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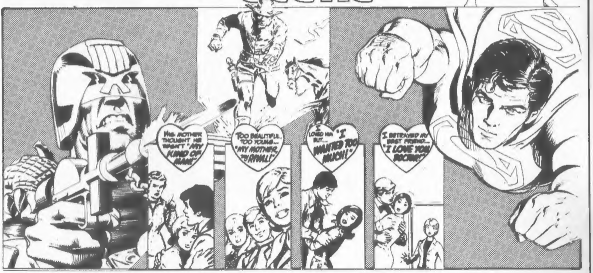
ISSUE #11 SEPTEMBER

COMICS SCENE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I BETCHA JUST AS PRETTY AS MOMMY. I LOVE YOU, TOO!

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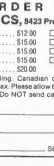

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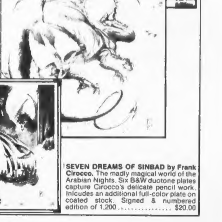

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COMICS SCENE

Issue No. 11 September, 1983

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ABOUT THE COVER: Superman is ready for new dangers in the current *Superman III*. Writer Cary Bates talks about the Man of Steel in print and on screen beginning on page 32. Then, here's a sneak peek at the new look for the X-Men, courtesy of new penciller John Romita, Jr. Our new managing editor, Pat O'Neill, colored the piece and it looks great. For more on the uncanny mutants, see Chris Claremont's interview on page 29. SUPERMAN ® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC.; X-MEN © 1983 MARVEL COMICS GROUP.

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Word Balloons

On the Road Again

The spring has been a rather busy one around here. We have a variety of one-shot magazines coming out that have kept each one of us breathless. I edited the *Superman III Poster Magazine*, now out, and then took a needed vacation. On the way back, I began a series of weekend trips to conventions and comic shops. Some of the highlights:

ACADIANA CON: Down in Lafayette, LA,I was the Guest of Honor at a weekend-long party. I had never been down south before and it was a wonderful experience. The people there were like a bunch of friends I never knew I had. The highlight was the entrance Rob Neagle, Scott Weyder and I made to the Cong Show contest—in togas, with chop sticks hanging out of our ears. And we were the judges! One of the best cons I have been to in quite some time.

COLLECTOR'S COMICS: Just before vacation John Romita, Jr., Bob Rozakis and I were guests at the first anniversary of the first of two Collector's Comics shops on Long Island. The week I returned, the three of us reconvened for the second shop's party. We all got a chance to chat with the fans and watch what they were buying. The biggest shock was when a 14-year-old asked Jim. the owner, "Who's Jack Kirby?" J.R. and I began feeling very old.

INCREDIBLE PULP: Dave and Deni Sim of Cerebus fame came to Long Island for an autograph party so my wife and I met with them for brunch and a general discussion about life, comics and aardvarks. They then spent hours talking with the fans as I watched off to the side. Yes, it's true, Dave really does change voices as often as Mel Blanc. His Elrod is terrific!

I-CON II: Stony Brook is only a half-hour from home so this was an easy con to commute to. I was there mainly as a STARLOG guest but Marvel's Bob Harras and I shared a comics panel that was interesting. One of the topics discussed was: is it fair to kill a character, say Phoenix or Captain Marvel, and tease the reader with resurrections or hints thereof? We never came up with a satisfactory answer but had fun anyway.

CREATION: As usual I had fun speaking with a wide variety of creative talents but this time I hosted a panel with Paul Smith, Mike W. Barr, Marv Woltman and Ron Wilson. It was supposed to be about graphic novels but after we looked at slides from Ron's wonderful-looking *Superboxers*, we got into the current debate over violence in comics. No, nothing got resolved. The discussion continues. Meanwhile, I continued trying to talk people into broadening their horizons so they can actually buy comics published by somebody other than, in most cases, Marvel. I'm continually amazed to see how closed-minded some fans are. One actually told me the comics from First, Pacific, Eclipse, et. al. looked good but since there's no resale market as yet, he won't bother buying them—even for his own enjoyment!

With all that behind me, I got back to the offices and, with Pat O'Neill, got this issue finished and look forward to another busy summer of conventioneering, although my wife threatens to kill me if I don't come back.

* * *

Last issue. I promised an introduction to our new managing editor. Well, say hi to Patrick Daniel O'Neill. Pat has been involved with comics and science fiction fandom for years and as a freelancer, wrote articles for COMICS SCENE #5 and 8. You can also find some of his work in the early issues of *Marvel Age*. The week he joined, we had just sent *CS #10* to the printer and I was finishing *Superman III* before escaping to Mexico for a week. Pat, meanwhile, pitched in to help STARLOG #72 get finished. To see what he looks like, check out that issue. Meanwhile, he helped us out of a tight squeeze by coloring the X-Men portion of our cover after John Romita, Jr. turned in the art and we were faced with the (pardon the cliche) dreaded deadline doom. Welcome aboard.

—Robert Greenberger, C.N.J

Lettering

I KNOW WORK. I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. I DO LIKE THE PLAID WALLPAPER BETTER. THIS STUFF IS MUCH TOO INVOLVED.
YES, MASTER.
CHARACTER © 1985 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Controversy

Boy, run a few nasty letters and everyone comes out of the woodwork to defend their favorite magazines, companies and creators. Well, at least it keeps Pat and Bob busy. As usual, they read everything they receive but can't personally answer any of the letters. Regardless, send your missives, queries, comments and critiques to

Lettering
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10016

On Issue Nine

Dear Bob,

. . . Issue 9 of your excellent publication just arrived at the local comic shop, and I thought I'd comment, something I haven't done yet.

My favorite feature was the second part of the Dave and Deni Sim interview. I don't read Cerebus, but I may start after reading this interview (actually I just like people who wear holey socks). The Pacific article was well-written and reminded me how exciting comics are now. Two years ago, Marvel and DC dominated. Now we've got Eclipse, Pacific, First, and various other companies. It's these companies that have revolutionized the medium.

The Frazetta piece was nice, as were the other two articles concerning *Fire and Ice*. However, I don't really like animation coverage in general, unless it has to do with comic book characters or creators.

Loose Cruse is definitely one of the two best features in your book (the other being Guest Spot, which I missed this issue). I am not familiar with Mr. Cruse's work, but his column is always informative.

The rest of the issue was very good, except for the *Terry and the Pirates* article. I was born 20 years after Milton Caniff left the strip, so it was a little before my time.

All in all, this issue was right up to par with your previous efforts. Keep up the good work!

Jason Napora
5 Peabody Drive
Oxford, OH 45056

Dear Editor,

. . . I do have a small problem and I'm hoping that you or any of your readers may be able to help me. I don't exactly live in a big city and there is only one place in town that carries comics, and it is a meager selection at that. It's hard enough to get hold of any of the current issues, much less get to a comics dealership store where I can find the more esoteric items, such as *Camelot 3000*. In fact, I have to be in the right place at the right time so as not to miss the latest COMICS SCENE (which has already happened once, which means I have to pay the back-issue rate). I can't afford to get subscriptions to *all* of my favorite titles, but I certainly don't want to miss some of the new ideas coming out like Batman and the Outsiders or the New Talent Showcase. Any suggestions. . . ?

In closing, let me say that your magazine is one whose time has come, and I sincerely hope it will continue to fill me with pleasure and information about the comics world for a long time.

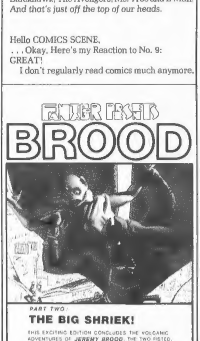
Michal Jacot
108 Main Street
East Tawas, MI 48730

Your question has put us in a difficult spot. There's so much material that is actually good these days, it's hard to choose. We recommend you look for subscription service ads to ensure you get what you want. As for what we recommend: Pat and Bob suggest you consider X-Men, Teen Titans, Legion of Super-Heroes, Blackhawk, The Avengers, Ms. Tree and E-Man. And that's just off the top of our heads.

Hello COMICS SCENE,

. . . Okay, Here's my Reaction to No. 9: GREAT!

I don't regularly read comics much anymore,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but your magazine is great. I like to keep in touch with what's going on, ya know? Anyway, aside from saying that issue #9 was great, I'd like to say that you folks have a good thing going there with Mr. Ron Goulart. I find his historic articles very interesting and the guy is a very good writer to boot. Many fans may not care for Goulart's work. Too bad! If you are more interested in The New Titans or X-Men than you are in the history of a golden comics great like *Captain Easy* or *Terry and the Pirates*, well then I wouldn't call you much of a fan! Contemporary stuff is fine, but it wouldn't exist were it not for these artistic trailblazers. Keep Goulart busy, Robert! It's important for the fans to keep in touch with the roots of the industry!

Finally, I'd just like to say "Hi" to Mr. Zimmerman, and also let you all know that I'm looking forward to Will Murray's article on *Doc Savage*. How about featuring Doc on the cover of issue #11?

Brian Dreger
Elyria, Ohio 44035

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . . Re: CS #9 — Bravo! Huzzahs!

In my 40 years of pro endeavors in and out of the comic book medium, I've all too rarely been excited by new talent coming into print — but, by god, with you, it was at first sight of the likes of Mssrs. Frank Thorne and Rich Corben and recently, our new young creative Canadian curmudgeon of Kitchener (a town through which I drove to and from Wasaga Beach). Each of these important talents are gifted visionaries, concerned thinkers of worthy intellect and heart and motivation — as well as damned fine storytelling artists! Each using his own voice, making his own statement, creating his own wonderful world for us to explore and enjoy! Bless 'em all! And many more like them!!

Young Dave Sim possesses an uncanny eye for dramatic positive/negative space as he designs his panels and pages. His blacks, whites, dotscreen greytones, textures and patterns are beautifully composed — and too few writers have his keen sense of pacing, telling pauses, or his ear for conversational dialogue. All this and he paints striking covers, too! And he's given able assists by his equally acute partner, Deni, at every turn — lucky man!

Thank you for interviewing them CS — they've a fine future ahead of 'em, for all their damned hard work, they deserve the lot! Their heads are screwed on right, they sidestep, wisely, the vagaries of celebrity and big time bamboozlin'.

Alex Toth
Hollywood, CA

This is just one of many letters praising both the Sims and the two-part interview conducted by our own Dave McDonnell. All the praise has made Dave blush permanently.

Dear Editor,

. . . in regards to the May COMICS SCENE, Ron Goulart doesn't seem to think much of George Wunder's work on *Terry and the Pirates*. I wish COMICS SCENE would do an article on this much underrated man's work.

On scripting and drawing the strip, Wunder kept Milton Caniff's basic concepts that made up *Terry and the Pirates*.

Terry Lee's home was still the Orient, in the post WW II era. As a U.S. Air Force officer, Terry had an Air Force colleague, Charles C. Charles, who shared Terry's experiences in the China theater of the world.

There was the usual cast of characters that would appear on the scene from time to time — Pat Ryan, the Dragon Lady, Connie and Big Stoop.

Aside from this, the comic series could be viewed as separate and independently Wunder's creation. For myself, there were aspects of the strip that possessed this independent merit; Wunder's artwork, though Caniff derivative, was individual and stylistic enough to give a bigger than life quality to the character of Terry and friends.

Characterization and drama were predominant in the script and emphasized what action and conflict existed in the storyline.

Because of the long continuity of the strip by Wunder, the series deserves a critique on its merits.

Tony Fazzini
420 East 8th St.
Pittsburg, CA 94565

What Time Is It?

Dear Bob,

. . . One of the more pleasant tasks while working at DC Comics was helping along the legend of *The Warlord* with Mike Grell. "Iron Mike" is one of the most creative and talented people in our field and I've always enjoyed it whenever he has put pen to paper. Our working relationship was one that often went around, over and through some stumbling blocks placed in our path by certain "powers that be." We had fun creating despite deadline problems and some unreasonable "corporate thinking." We had a great time . . .

BUT — I refuse to take blame for an "exacerbating" of a so-called "error" in reference to the passage of time in the last world of Skartaris in *The Warlord* legend. The unexplained and seemingly twisted time problem of the Inner World were part of Mike's concept from the beginning. If he wishes to clean the slate as he leaves the book so that no future writer/artist attempt to explain his unique time concept, fine . . . but don't use me as the scapegoat!

Mike's explanation of the "error" is, in itself, erroneous, which makes me wonder if he's ever referred back to his own creations. He first refers to Mariah having difficulty adjusting to the ways of Skartaris and then says, "Later, there was a-tale in which Morgan returned earthside. . . ." Later? "Later"? Morgan's return earthside was the story which introduced Mariah, so it could have hardly come "later." In the same story (*Warlord* #6 — the first one I edited), Morgan utters the (unedited) line "I knew time was mixed up in Skartaris, but eight years?!?!" (in reference to his being down there far longer than he realized). Also, if we look back to *First Issue Special* #8, (the first *Warlord* adventure), there reads the caption: "Time — the intangible master that enslaves king and commoner alike! . . . Travis Morgan has just been set free. . . ."

So if Mike says, ". . . time progresses down there the same way it progresses up here," he's either changed his concept, forgotten his concept, or he's fibbin'! And it ain't my fault!

Jack C. Harris

Popping Balloons

Dear Mr. Greenberger & Mr. Zimmerman,

. . . I have been reading your publication since issue #1 and I have noticed a very disturbing trend. Namely, you guys, almost every issue, rebuild the end of comics and deem for comics fans everywhere into superhero-hell.

The reasons you give for the approaching holocaust are: 1) Marvel Comics — who everybody knows are nothing but greedy savage beasts who pander pap to adolescents with power and domination fantasies; 2) that everybody everywhere are publishing nothing but superheroes which are, of course, outdated and unoriginal. What a load of crap.

Eclipse puts out *Ms. Tree*, *Sabre*, *Scorpio Rose* and *Destroyer Duck*. Not a superhero in the bunch! Pacific Comics hardly has any superheroes — OK, the *Rocketeer*, but any others? Is Groo a superhero or Elric? First has only one superhero — *E-Man*.

James Walker
Hawaii

Dear Robert

. . . Your Word Balloons column in #9 provokes me to write before looking at the rest of the issue. Because of COMICS SCENE, and only that reason, I have recently gone "back" to check out the comics on the racks. Now that I've sampled the mainstream, I can't say I'm very impressed. I should stress I'm not complaining about artwork, but the overall mindset.

DC seems to have many people from Marvel whom I quit reading, and I think the recent publishing of *Amethyst* #1 and *Crystar* #1 shows that perfectly. The latter was packaged nicely, but even the quasi-Classics Illustrated cover couldn't hide the fact that it was an obvious commercial work in competition to the other, with no real substance. *Amethyst*, on the other hand, was modestly presented but with more substance.

I can't understand how Marvel can be so big and still not have it together to put coupons on their ads for those of us who don't choose to live near a comics store.

Stephen Carner
Box 102
Elk, CA 95432

Dear COMICS SCENE:

. . . After reading Robert Greenberger's editorial: "Superheroes are not Alternative!" in COMICS SCENE #9, I must admit to a certain amount of confusion. If I understand the word "alternative," as I feel it applies to comics, then I'm afraid that Mr. Greenberger must be labeled an extremist.

Who is to say that because Pacific, First or Eclipse release the "Adventures of Captain Smith," that this book can't be as well-done or as entertaining as Ms. Tree or Warp or whatever your favorite alternative comic happens to be. Mr. Greenberger? I'm sure that even you will agree that the *Rocketeer*, one of Pacific's best-received efforts of last year, is a superhero strip of the highest caliber. There

[Continued on page 62]

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Comics Reporter

DC COMICS

DC Raises Prices to 75¢; Adds New Titans & Legion Titles

In late April, Paul Levitz, vice-president of Operations, made two announcements affecting the entire DC line and its publishing goals. The first announcement was the expected price rise, coming with December cover-dated books, shipping in August. All of DC's 60¢ titles will increase to 75¢ and switch from newsprint to the popular, whiter Mando stock now in use across the industry. At present, DC only employs it for annuals and anniversary issues.

The other announcement concerned two new titles, to be printed in the Baxter-format now used for *Camelot 3000* and *The Omega Men*. Comics featuring the *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *New Teen Titans* will premiere next spring alongside the Mando titles. For the first year, there will be two sets of Titans stories, while tentative plans call for the Mando *Legion* book to carry reprints.

After the first year, the Mando titles will begin reprinting the stories from the Baxter books, which will begin with new titles and numbering from #1. DC makes the analogy between publishing a book in hardcover and then a year or so later, following with a softcover edition at a cheaper price. In this case, the $1.25 Baxter comics will present stories that, a year later, will show up in the 75¢ Mando companion titles.

If successful, more books will use this format of secondary titles featuring reprints from the Baxter comics, increasing the number of DC publications without necessarily doubling the workload. A third book is already being planned, but its title has not been announced.

This move represents a refocusing of DC's interest in the non-returns/direct-sales market. Both Mando and Baxter titles will be made available in the comics shops while an announcement will be made in the DC comics about the upcoming changes.

Titans' creative team Marv Wolfman and George Perez have rearranged their schedules, clearing the decks for a full-year's worth of new Titans stories in both books. If the *Legion* Mando book goes reprint, Levitz and Keith Giffen will prepare framing sequences.

As for the price hike, the usual economic factors were cited, including increased costs for printing at World Color Press. The sole-surviving giant-sized comic, *G.I. Combat*, will increase its price to $1.25 while the *Best of DC Digest* will remain unchanged at $1.25. Next year's annuals have not been priced although this year's crop now costs $1.50.

George Perez and Marv Wolfman will be doing two Teen Titans stories a month for a year, starting next spring.

Reaction around the industry to the increases remains mixed although Marvel and Archie have said they will hold their prices at 60¢ for as long as possible.

COMIC STRIPS

Family Circus' Bil Keane Gets 1983 Reuben Award from NCS

Bil Keane won his profession's highest honor, the Reuben Award for Cartoonist of the Year, April 17th at the National Cartoonists Society's 37th awards dinner in Beverly Hills, California.

Bil Keane and his Reuben award.

Then-NCS President Keane said the banquet, traditionally held in New York City, was moved to the West Coast in an effort to "make the society more of a national organization."

Also nominated for the Reuben were Jim Davis and Gary Trudeau, who this year suspended publication on *Doonesbury* to work on other projects.

"It's particularly gratifying to win this award," Keane said, admiring his golden statuette, "especially when running against two giants in the field—although one of them is a sleeping giant.

"It was such a great feeling to have the place come apart like that—the cheers, the applause—when my name was read," the *Family Circus* creator added later that evening. "Of course, that moment was the crowning glory to the whole evening!" For a profile on Keane, see COMICS SCENE #8.

In addition to the Reuben, NCS presented its 1982 Category Awards. The magazine cartooning award went to Dan Orsbek, whose work appears in *Playboy* and other publications; sports cartooning to Karl Hubenthal of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*; the humor strip prize was given to Brant Parker (*Wizard of Id*); the award for comic book work went to Bob Gustafson, for Gold Key's *Beetle Bailey* books which he produces with Mort Walker; the animation award was given to Bill Melendez, for the *Peanuts* TV specials. Other awards included: Special features to Don Martin, for his *Mad* books published by Warner Paperbacks; advertising and illustration to Arnold Roth, who drew the "History of Sex" feature for *Playboy*; editorial cartooning to Mike Peters of the Dayton (Ohio) *Daily News*; story strip to Dick Moores (*Gasoline Alley*); and syndicated panel to Jim Unger (*Herman*).

On the minds of some dinner guests were the recent deaths of several cartoonists, induced, perhaps, by the brief tributes to Noel Sickles, Hal Foster, Ernie Bushmiller and the last-minute notice on Alfred Andriola in the program book. However, in keeping with NCS policy, no eulogies were given during the awards ceremonies; separate memorial services are planned instead.

In other NCS news, newly elected members of the board took office on June 5th. Overseeing business for 1983-1985 are: Arnold Roth, President; Frank Evers, First Vice-President; Fred Lasswell, Second Vice-President; Bill Hoest, Secretary; George Wolfe, Treasurer; Hy Eisman, General Membership Representative; and Mell Lazarus, National Representative.

—William R. Lund

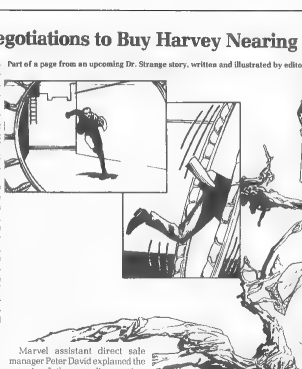
MARVEL COMICS

Marvel's Negotiations to Buy Harvey Nearing Completion

Marvel Comics legal representative David Fox says the company has reached an agreement "in principle" for the purchase of the rights to Harvey Comics' characters. Whether the deal involves all rights (including merchandising), just a publishing license, or an outright purchase of Harvey as a corporation is not clear. Fox says the contract is still in negotiation.

Harvey's characters include the very successful Richie Rich (once published in more separate titles than any other comics character), and the well-known Casper the Friendly Ghost, as well as Wendy the Good Little Witch, Baby Huey, and many others. Harvey also once owned popular adventure characters like the Black Cat and the Three Rocketeers. It's unknown if any deal between Harvey and Marvel will include rights to those concepts, as some may have passed into public domain.

Part of a page from an upcoming Dr. Strange story, written and illustrated by editor Carl Potts.



NEW KIDDIE LINE TO COME

In line with the Harvey deal, Marvel announced in April the formation of a new line of comics, aimed at younger readers. Tom DeFalco has been named Executive Editor in charge of the line. He is considered the Marvel editor with the most experience in the "kiddie comic" field, since he was formerly an editor with Archie Comics.

Marvel assistant direct sale manager Peter David explained the genesis of the new line, saying, "The sum of the books is to fill the gap left by companies like Harvey leaving the business. What got me into comics was *Casper* and *Richie Rich*. Those kinds of books must continue to exist, or we're going to lose a whole generation of readers."

Promotion manager Len Sapp and David point out that Marvel's three-issue *Smurfs* mini-series sold phenomenally well last fall—doing four times as well as expected in the direct market—indicating that a market for children's comics still exists.

There are several titles for the new line in the planning stages. In related news, editor Carl Potts is working with Louise Jones (in her first writing assignment) and newcomer June Brigman on a team of what Jones calls "little kid superheroes." Called the *Power Pack*, they are four children ages five-and-a-half to 11, who are unexpectedly endowed with superpowers. Jones stresses that they are not mutants, just normal kids suddenly thrust into a new way of life. Potts and Jones described the new series, debuting in a double-sized issue late in 1983, as "a cross of Andre Norton, Robert Heinlein and *Donald Duck* comics."

JEDI GETS OUT EARLY

The distribution folks at Marvel did some mail-biting in early May, when the comics magazine adaptation of *Return of the Jedi* showed up in direct-sales shops more than three weeks before the premiere of the film.

Although Marvel had made every effort to keep the title off sale until May 26, the day after the movie opened, apparently some direct distributors jumped the gun and shipped the books to retailers.

On May 3, Marvel received a telegram from Lucasfilm's counsel, essentially saying in legal terms, "Get the books out of the stores." Marvel responded by sending a mailgram to all the direct-sales distributors, telling them to hold onto *Jedi* until May 26, or, if they had already sent the books to the shops, to see that the retailers removed them from display. In addition, Marvel's direct-sales manager, Carol Kalish, her assistant, Peter David, and direct-sales promotion manager Len Sapp, dubbed the "Jedi Hit Squad," visited comic shops throughout the New York area—to assure that the adaptation was not on sale.

Just to compound the problem, on May 5, the New York *Post* printed an article detailing the plot of *Jedi*, crediting the Marvel adaptation.

Everything seems to have been resolved satisfactorily. Lucasfilm's vice president for merchandising, Sidney Ganis, termed the early release "unfortunate, but not earth-shattering."

MARVEL COMICS

Carl Potts Creates a New Universe

Marvel used to call itself the "House of Ideas" . . . and the busiest room at that house these days seems to be Carl Potts' office. In addition to the *Power Pack*, Potts is developing a samurai series, set in feudal Japan. The art will be by Steve Leialoha with a script by Alan Zelenetz.

Zelmetz is also the writer for *The Alien Legion*, a title Potts describes as the adventures of a group of "footsloggers and soldiers of fortune, priests and poets, killers and cads. . . ." Set in the far future, this "Foreign Legion in Space" will be drawn by SF illustrator Frank Cirocco, in his first comic-book work. It's scheduled for a December release. Also out of the Potts stable is a "high-adventure" anthology title. Potts says the title will include adventure of any type, historical to SF, with two Steve Englehart-scripted tales already in house; one pencilled by John Severin, the other by Paul Smith.

In other news from Marvel artist Val Mayerik and writer Steve Gerber have sold a new property to Epic Comics, through Mike Friedrich's Star*Reach agency. The title is *Void Indigo*, and the first appearance will be in a Graphic Novel set for a late '83 release. No details yet on the series' content. Marvel is moving into the 3-D craze, with a special edition of *Dr. Strange*. Michael Golden is tentatively scheduled to pencil and ink, with the master mage's regular scripter, Roger Stern, at the typewriter.

And, in what sounds like a joke, but isn't—Marvel is planning a *Generic Comic Book*, promised to include "the adventures of Super-Hero, plus one damsel, one wrecked, abandoned building, one breakout from Ryker's Island, three cops shooting bullets to no effect, and 1900 rubbernecking bystanders." This unusual title will be written by A Writer, pencilled by An Artist and finished by An Inker.

ANIMATION

New Sked Favors Cutesy People

All three networks unveiled their new Saturday morning schedules for the fall season, beginning September 17, and for the second year in a row, adventure shows were replaced by programming favoring "cute" characters.

A glance at the three different schedules shows the 10 new shows are predominantly filled with loveable people—a move to counter the phenomenal success of NBC's The Smurfs.

Correspondent Darrell McNeil reports: "The Teen Titans series would have been produced by Hanna-Barbera for ABC but was aced out in favor of the continuing search for a Smurf-like success story. A shame too, because the series' story proposals promised a real treat for Titans fans. Basically, all the Titans would be present, except for Terra and Robin (who's on detached service to Super Friends). Wonder Girl would have been group leader and storylines would have promised appearances from Trigon and Blackfire. The proposed X-Men show from Marvel almost made NBC's schedule and would have featured Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler, Cyclops, Ariel, Lady Lightning (an animated version of Ms. Marvel who has been kicking around for years), Thunderbird (back from the dead and able to change into any animal-form) and Wolverine(???). Also, the action would have them as students at Professor X's high school."

By network, here's the new lineup:

ABC: 8 a.m. *Best of Scooby Doo* (reruns); 8:30 *Little Rascals/Richie Rich Show*; 9:00 *Monchhichis* (those adorable dolls are now given a world in which to play); 9:30 *Pac-Man*; 10:00 *Rubik the Amazing Cube* (Ruby-Spears animates the adventures of a puzzle); 10:30 *The Littles* (another collection of little people); 11:00 *The Puppy's Further Adventures*; 11:30 *Scooby & Scrappy Doo with the Fonz*. *Super Friends* has been pulled until midseason and when it returns there will be 14 new episodes.

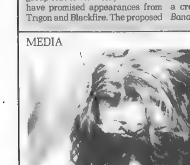
NBC: 8:00 *Flintstone Funnies*; 8:30 *The Short Tales*; 9:00 *The Smurfs* (with 11 new episodes and Baby Smurf); 10:30 *Alvin and the Chipmunks* (all new adventures); 11:00 *Mr. T Mysteries* will star Mr. T and a crew of gymnasts; 11:30 *Going Bananas* (a live-action comedy starring a monkey); 12:00 *Amazing Spider-Man* (without the *Hulk* but with eight new episodes); 12:30 *Thundarr the Barbarian* (Ruby-Spears' homegrown hero lives on in reruns). Gone are the *Hulk*, *The Incredibles* and *Flash Gordon*.

CBS: 8:00 *The Biskits* (cute dogs in a medieval setting); 8:30 *Saturday Supercade* (Ruby-Spears brings us the animated adventures of Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong, Jr., Frogger, Q*Bert and Pitfall); 9:30 *Dungeons and Dragons* (Marvel Productions); 10:00 *The Dukes* (this time favoring the original stars, Tom Wopat and John Schneider); 10:30 *Charlie Brown & Snoopy Show* (new adventures); 11:00 *Benji* (the dog teams up with an alien and a robot); 11:30 *Bugs Bunny / Road Runner Show*; 1:00 *New Fat Albert*. Gone are the unsuccessful *Meatballs & Spaghetti*, and *Pandamonium*.

Pac-Man graduates to his own half-hour show next September.

Elsewhere, Marvel continues to develop *US* for a syndicated series similar to Filmation's *Masters of the Universe*. Marvel is also planning a five-episode *G.I. Joe* mini-series to test the syndicated waters. Two of the 65 *Masters* episodes were screened early this spring and positive sounds came from California. McNeil says, "The only problem with the series if the lack of violence, needed to make this show more palatable to the kiddie protection squads."

MEDIA



Christopher Lambert as Tarzan in the forthcoming Greystoke movie from Warner Bros.

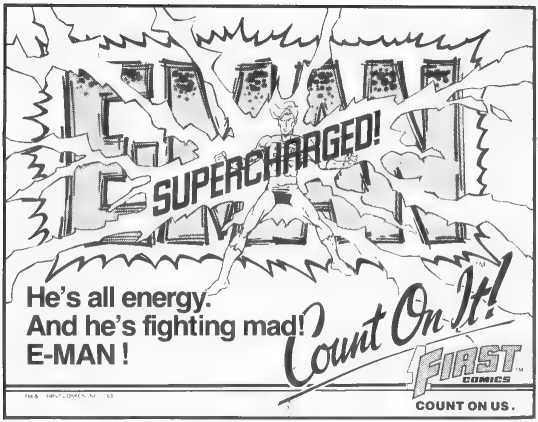
Tanya Roberts is new Sheena

Tanya Roberts, last seen in *Beastmaster* and *Playboy*, has been cast as Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. The Columbia Pictures production begins live action photography in Kenya in November. Paul Aratow will produce the film while John Guillermin directs. Look for detailed coverage in the future.

Supergirl began production in April with Helen Slater in the lead. Peter O'Toole plays Zaltar, the founder of Argo City while Faye Dunaway will be seen as the world's meanest woman. Cary Bates tells us there are some liberties being taken with the origin, but Argo City is still a surviving chunk of Krypton. Kara Zor-El does leave it as a teen to come to Earth. Marc McClure will resume his Jimmy Olsen persona to link the two super-series together. . . NBC picked up **Manimal**, the Glen Larson produced series featuring Simon MacCorkindale as a man who can change into a black panther only at night. Melody Anderson, Dale Arden in 1980's *Flash Gordon*, will be seen as the girl takes him out for a walk and gives him milk at night. . . **Charlie Chan** may be back on the beat again. A series of six, new two-hour telefilms featuring the famed Oriental detective created by Earl Derr Biggers is now in development. . . **David and Leslie Newman** discuss what they've been up to since we talked to them back in issue #2 in the current STARLOG (#73). Leslie says *The Shadow* project is next on producer Martin Bergman's ever-changing schedule.

The Creative Team Shuffle

For those who haven't heard, **Paul Smith** will be leaving the X-Men after issue #175 to pursue *Doctor Strange*, a character he has been interested in for a long time. **John Romita Jr.** will be the new penciller on the X-Men in addition to his work on *Amazing Spider-Man*. One interesting note is that Romita, Jr. was going to pencil **Bob Layton's** Spider-Man graphic novel but with the added work, that assignment has fallen to Smith, who's a closet Spider-Man fan. . . Until Smith can take on *Dr. Strange*, editor **Carl Potts** has assigned several fill-ins including an issue by Potts, one by **Steve Leialoha** and one written by **Ann Nocenti** and drawn by newcomer **Tony Salmons**. . . **Pat Broderick** has left Firestorm in favor of work at Pacific Comics but will stay around to illustrate the Firestorm graphic novel, due next year. Taking over will be newcomer **Rafael Satrayan** with Broderick has been working with. Until he takes over, fill-in issues will be done by **George Tuska** and **Gene Colan**. . . **Tom Mandrake** has been announced as the penciller for DC's *Star Trek* book due this fall. . . With **Tom DeFalco** moving on to the junior link, **Danny Fingeroth** has inherited the Spider-Man books with **Bob DeNatale** as his assistant. . . **Curt Swan** has penciled a *Legion of Super-Heroes* fill-in which will have a **Keith Giffen** framing sequence. The story spotlights Star Boy. . . **Len Wein** and **Dave Gibbons** have become the new team on *Green Lantern* beginning later this year. . . **Richard Howell** has penciled a *Secret Origins/All-Star Squadron* fill-in for echtor/writer **Roy Thomas**.



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News from Around the Industry

AMERICOMICS

Starmasters, the first of Americomics line of $1.00 titles, is scheduled for release in July or August.

Americomics' editor William Black says the books will be printed on "white" newsprint, a grade Black says is better than the Mando stock used by Marvel, First and Pacific for their direct-sales titles. *Starmasters* is currently planned as a two-issue test, with a bi-monthly schedule.

The contents of the first issue are: "The Women of W.O.S.P. [Women's Outer Space Patrol]," by Tom Lyle, and "Bread," by Paul Ryan. Cover is by Paul Gulacy.

Starmasters' companion title, planned for a November release, is *Bolt and Starforce Six*. No changes are planned in the price or format of AC's other titles. *Americomics* and *Black Diamond*, though Black says plans are in the works to move *Black Diamond* to bi-monthly status with the third issue.

ARCHIE

Just a quick note from Archie Comics this time out, with word that Bob Bolling, the creator of "Little Archie," will be returning to work for them with a story in *Archie and Me* #141, entitled "The New Teacher." It's Bolling's first new work for Archie in some time. Bolling's work is often mentioned by fans of the Archie titles in the same way that Donald Duck fans talk about Carl Barks.

Barry Windsor-Smith is a big Cerebus the Aardvark fan and for the next Swords of Cerebus collection, he has contributed the covers. Here is an unfinished view of the back cover. It's interesting to note that Cerebus started as a parody of Smith's work on *Conan the Barbarian*

CAPITAL COMICS

Capital Comics publisher John Davis has announced that *Badger* #1 will be a 32-page Baxter book, selling at $1.75 and premiering in July. It's written by Nexus scripter Mike Baron, with art by newcomer Jeff Butler. The second issue will be penciled by Rick Burchett and inked by Butler.

Badger and Nexus #3, also set for July release, are the first issues from Capital at the new $1.75 price, a move Capital's business manager, Milton Gregg, attributed to "high costs associated with . . . production values superior to most comics currently on the market."

ECLIPSE COMICS

Editor Dean Mullaney announced in May plans for *Ms Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures* to go monthly with issue #4. Reader and sales response has been exceedingly strong, he noted, and this will be the second monthly title from Eclipse, alongside *Eclipse Monthly*.

Not to be outdone by Marvel, Mullaney added that every Eclipse editor will be in attendance at this August's San Diego Comic Art Convention. The editorial staff includes Mullaney, Cat Yronwode, Steve Gerber and Mark Evanier.

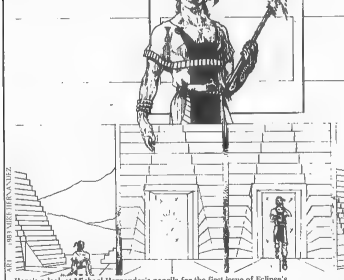
FANTAGRAPHICS

Los Brothers Hernandez have the third issue of *Love and Rockets* on the way to the comics stores even as you read this. Highlighting the third issue is a "playful tribute" to the Lee-Kirby era of Marvel Comics, in "Maggie vs Maniak" by Jaime Hernandez. Brothers Mario and Bert also each have a tale to tell.

FIRST COMICS

E-Man joins the ranks of writer-artist created books when Joe Staton takes over the whole ball of wax with #9, on sale in August. Martin Pasko will plot issues 10 and 11, with Staton taking over full control with #12.

First's managing editor, Mike Gold, comments that writer-artist titles are nothing new at First, pointing to *American Flagg* by Howard Chaykin and *Jon Sable, Freelance* by Mike Grell. Staton, of course, created E-Man (with writer Nicola Cuti) back at Charlton in the mid-'70s.



Here's a look at Michael Hernandez's pencils for the first issue of Eclipse's *Aztec Ace* **comic, premiering this summer**

CAPITAL'S NEW COLOR COMICS

NEXUS no 3

By Baron & Rude

LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

FULL COLOR BAXTER BOOKS OUT IN JULY

WHAT?! Put on a costume and fight crime in the streets?!

...you'd have to be CRAZY!

Get it or get hit!

THE BADGER #1

By Baron & Butler

YES! I can't live without:

CAPITAL Publications Inc

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P.O. Box 908
Madison, WI 53701

In other First news, Gold says the adaptation of the Warp plays will end in Warp #9, due out in August. After that, the book will feature all-new stories picking up plot-threads from the plays. All this has also forced a re-scheduling of Warp Special #2, from July to September, along with a new story. The tale originally set for Special #2 has been held for a spring '84 release.

PACIFIC COMICS

Steve Schanes, it seems, has been announcing new books almost every month. Coming this summer are several new first issues and one-shot projects. Two are of special note to newcomers to the field. The Joe Kubert school has produced a one-shot, 1st Folio, due in mid-summer, and shipping in August is Vanguard #1, a 32-page, $1 Mando comic. The intent behind Vanguard is to match new writers, pencillers and inkers with already established talent to get their work exposed. The first issue features new scripter Dave Campiti teamed with artist Tom Yeates; a new series by the Nexus team: Mike Baron and Steve Rude, and a story written and illustrated by Australian Brandon McCarthy.

Other specials include *Captain Victory Special* #1 by Jack Kirby. The self-contained 28 page story features the Intergalactic Rangers going back in time and reliving the adventures of the Three Musketeers. Frank Thorne's *Ghita* stories from the Warren books have been collected as an 8½ x 11 squarebound, black-and-white volume, while Jim Starlin's five-story *Darklon* saga has been collected as 48 page Baxter one-shot.

Silver Heels #1 introduces us to a world of the future ruled by an alien "Master Race." The only humans allowed out are white, anglo-saxon types while all other minorities are kept in guest reservations. In one, Silver Heels, an American Indian, wants to be a space pilot but can't. This is his story, courtesy of Bruce Jones and Scott Hampton.

Also coming soon from Pacific is *Bold Adventure*, a bi-monthly comic written and edited by Bill DuBay with art by Rudy Nebres, John Severin, Trevor Von Eeden and Kent Williams. There will be stories spanning time and space with lots of promised action.

RED CIRCLE

Red Circle continues to find top-name artists to do first issue stories for them, as Carmine Infantino penciled *The Comet* #1, with inks by Alex Nino. The book is set for a July release. The backup feature, with the Comet's brother, the Hangman was also pencilled and inked by the Infantino/Nino team. The title was written and edited by Red Circle's newest editor, Bill DuBay, who joined Rich Buckler and Robin Snyder in May. DuBay was formerly an editor at the now-defunct Warren Magazines.

Because Buckler was so late with getting the various books out, Snyder and DuBay were brought in to edit all the other titles, save *Mighty Crusaders*, which will be the only book under Buckler's responsibility. Snyder says current plans call for more and more new titles over the next year including graphic novels and one-shot specials.

TITAN BOOKS

Coming this summer, in addition to the monthly *Judge Dredd* (see page 26), are several more

Bill DuBay has written and edited the return of the Comet for Red Circle. The comic, coming later this summer, heralds the art of Carmine Infantino and Alex Nino. DuBay hopes to tie together various inconsistencies in the Comet's history over the decades. The backup story to issue one is by Infantino and Alex Toth.

Marvelman, a long-time English superhero, gets his own special.

trade paperback collections. Shipping in June is *Robusters, Book One*. Written by Pat Mills and illustrated by Dave Gibbons, these stories originally appeared in 2000 A.D. and feature a future with robots. Not just robots, but funny and somewhat klutzy robots.

Also coming in June is *ABC Warriors, Book Two*, continuing the adventures of seven robot warriors in the same future as *Robusters*. In addition to 2000 A.D. reprints by Pat Mills, the book features a new color cover by Mike McMahon and three new interior pages by Kevin O'Neill.

The final June release is *Judge Death*, completing the reprints of Brian Bolland's run as *Dredd* artist. This seventh volume of *Dredd* stories features the return of Dredd's most dangerous foe and will be simultaneously released as both hard and softcover volumes.

Some of Angus McKie's work has recently been collected in *Comic Tales*, another Titan release which premiered in late May. Much of the material has seen print in *Heavy Metal* and the full-color volume also features work by Mike Feeney, Dave Huxley and Alan Craddock. The softcover is 52 pages.

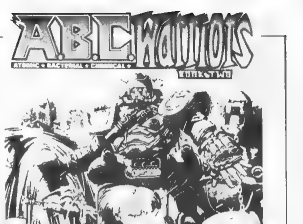
MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

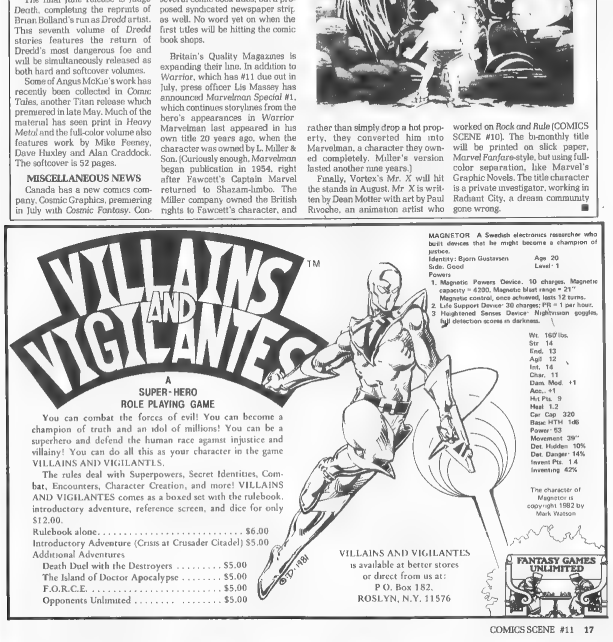
Canada has a new comics company, Cosmic Graphics, premiering in July with *Cosmic Fantasy*. Contents will be black-and-white, with a color cover by a "well-known comic artist," whose name the company had not revealed at press time. Prices also were not settled before COMICS SCENE went to press, but Cosmic's business manager, J. Scafe, said the book would retail at $1.25 or $1.50.

New comics companies just seem to be sprouting up all over, since the direct-sales market changed the way comic books are sold. Another new entry is "just imagine. . . ." Studios, with an ambitious list of projects that includes not only several comic book titles, but a proposed syndicated newspaper strip, as well. No word yet on when the first titles will be hitting the comic book shops.

Britain's Quality Magazines is expanding their line. In addition to *Warrior*, which has #11 due out in July, press officer Lis Massey has announced *Marvelman Special* #1, which continues storylines from the hero's appearances in *Warrior*. Marvelman last appeared in his own title 20 years ago, when the character was owned by L. Miller & Son. (Curiously enough, Marvelman began publication in 1954, right after Fawcett's Captain Marvel returned to Shazam-limbo. The Miller company owned the British rights to Fawcett's character, and rather than simply drop a hot property, they converted him into Marvelman, a character they owned completely. Miller's version lasted another nine years.)

Finally, Vortex's *Mr. X* will hit the stands in August. *Mr X* is written by Dean Motter with art by Paul Rivoche, an animation artist who worked on *Rock and Rule* (COMICS SCENE #10). The bi-monthly title will be printed on slick paper, *Marvel Fanfare*-style, but using full-color separation, like Marvel's Graphic Novels. The title character is a private investigator, working in Radiant City, a dream community gone wrong. ■

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End. 13
Agil 12
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Dam. Mod. +1
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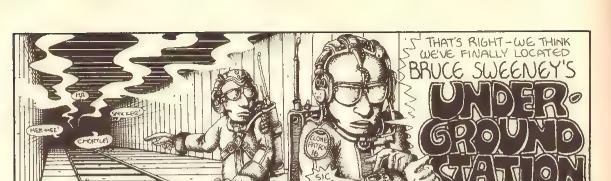

The logo this month is from the prolific Brad Foster who has *Goodies* #6 available from Jabberwocky Graphics: 4109 Pleasant Run; Irving, TX 75062. Six issues are available on a subscription basis for $3.00.

PRE-SUMMER DOLDRUMS

Since the months just prior to summer commonly herald a diminishing of underground comix output, let me draw readership attention to yet another fine British product—*Knockabout Comics* #5, which is available from Last Gasp and Capitol City. It features a 15-page story from Hunt Emerson, a four-page story from Cliff Harper, who did *Gloss War* for Denis Kitchen, a two-page Chris Welch tale and several other items. The piece de resistance, however, would have to be *Yarns of Death and Guts* by Pokkatz which is a stunning avant.on adventure spoof.

Jay Kennedy reports that *The Official Underground and Newave Price Guide* will evolve to the title *Alternative Comix Guide* to avoid any possible law suits. He's currently updating the *Guide*. Allegedly, one of the biggest names in u.g. art will be doing the cover. It stands a good chance of being published by 1985. By the way, Jay is now the cartoon editor at *Esquire* starting with the July issue which went on sale in June, and Trina Robbins is having fun working on a paper doll book for Troubadour Press.

Rip-Off #12 hit the stands as spring was in full bloom with a great Shelton cover.

IT-MIGHT-AS-WELL-BE-TOLD DEPT.

Anthony Smith of *Paper Cuts* "fame" and I are at work co-editing an underground comic Contributions are being entertained by Anthony at 1414 Lynnview Drive, Houston, TX but my half of the project looks to be about finished.

Editing is an amazingly frustating function for someone who wants such immediate gratification as me, but so far I can be sure of material from Larry Todd, Roldo, Erling Jaxon, Whitney, Rippee, John Edgar, Shawn Kerr, J. Michael Leonard and Brad Foster. There are also some othe names being folded into the project which are either very good, well-known or both.

MINI'S

Newave East is 50¢ and a stamp from Gary Hardman, RD #2, Sherrod Hill Rd., Edinboro, PA 16412...Upchuck is a "neo primitive" u.g. mini for 35¢ pp from Ron Vicens, 648 Kalaina Street, Kailua, HI 96834...*V.D Cage* #2 is 75¢ from Scott Stevens, 2208 Parkside #117, Mesquite, TX 75150...*Penquin Summer* is $1.00 cash from Sorcerer Studio, 2521 N 40th, Seattle, WA. 98103...*Captain Saturn* and *Futurian Toad* #12 are $1.00 pp from Phantasy Press, 265 South Harbor, Lakewood, CO 80226...*Sweet Checks* #4, *Newave Mode EZ* and *Sleazy Scarlet* #8, are all 50¢ plus postage from Comix World, Box 7082, Berkeley, CA 94707.

IMP Magazine is $2.50 pp from Eric Vincent, 2902 Renshaw, Houston, TX 77023. That may seem pricy, but it's a well-executed publication, complete with a pop-up display at the centerfold. It certainly left me wanting to see more...*The Blue Book*, retailing for $13.95 from Indigo Press, has many interesting comic erotic pages in full color featuring items by Leslie Cabarga, Gary Panter and Carol Ley...For $1.50 you can get *Ant-Chair* published by Rhesus Records, 383 Laurenceville Road, Laurenceville, NJ 08648, done by Matt Howarth and Jeffrey Rusnak. An odd tale of a poltergeist, a demonic witch spirit and a rock bank. Odd but fun. Recommended.

Steve Willis promises that *Sasquatch* #5, 50¢ each, is the last in the mini-line (which is actually pretty good). He threatens to return to doing *Cranium Frenzy* #4. Willis is still at: 1214 Cherry, Olympia, WA 98501...Bruce Chrislip writes that *City Limits Gazette* #7 (1562 E. Olive Way, Apt. 107, Seattle, WA. 98102) will feature a Harvey Pekar interview and possibly art by Brad Foster, Cliff Neal, Eric Vincent and Dave Miller. Bruce just recently got hitched.

Phantasy Press, 265 S. Harlan, Lakewood, CO 80226, has some neat mini's out that feature color occasionally and some excellent interior work by Matt Howarth.

CBG CONTROVERSY

There has been a recent flurry of concern about the new *Comic Buyer's Guide* policy on underground comix. In response to a letter questioning them about this, Advertising Manager Robert Schnall replies: "We have no stated policy regarding undergrounds but our informal guideline is that we will accept anything that will not offend the average family reader. We see no problems in running lists of titles, but graphic artwork, descriptions or titles will be reviewed on an individual basis.... Be sure to add an '18 or over' line on ads.

"We are probably a bit tighter now than in the old TBG days but we recognize the valid place u.g.s. occupy and we want to remain receptive to them."

A couple of people claim that CBG does not actually practice what it promises, but I have noted a few ads for undergrounds lately. Mr. Schnall would be best reminded that comic enthusiasts are not necessarily "average family readers". Also, a little censorship goes a long way. Certainly the contents of *Reform School Girl*, *Good Girl Art* and several contemporary science-fiction writers would be best left to the judgment of the buyer...or at best a bonafide critic and not to an administrative functionary.

One of the strengths of the old *Buyer's Guide* was the range of items advertised and the crazy harmony of diverse advertising. Good taste is one thing; ostracism is another. Let's keep our eye on Mr. Schnall's "informal guidelines" on one hand and give a new publication the benefit of the doubt on the other.

James Webb, a student of Will Eisner's, drew "God" for a school project and it will be printed in *Pure Entertainment* #3.

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Chris Claremont—Superstar

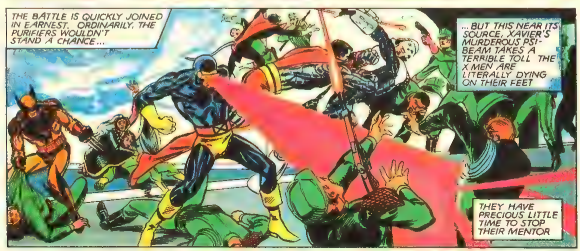
Part one of a talk with Fandom's favorite writer about mutants, new mutants and more

By DIANA SCHUTZ

Diana Schutz last reported on women and the comics in issue #8 and edits the Telegraph Wire *for Comics & Comix in California.*

In the ofttimes fickle comic book marketplace, it is rare for any one title to vault to the pinnacle of success and maintain that height for any great length of time. Rare, and yet clearly not impossible, since Marvel's *X-Men* continues today to be the line's top-selling title, some eight years after its resurrection in 1975. And one man to whom this particular success story is due is the book's writer, Christopher Claremont.

From somewhat humble beginnings as a Marvel "go-fer" back in 1969, Claremont has gone on to script, in addition to the all-new, all-different *X-Men*, such bestsellers as the Wolverine limited series and the Marvel/DC collaboration, *X-Men/New Teen Titans*. To this steady stable of mutants, Claremont has recently added a newer, younger group, fondly referred to as the "X-babies," and is currently chronicling their adventures in the pages of *The New Mutants. Homo superior*, however, is not the only subject for which Claremont has a certain affinity. His characterization of Marvel heroines, such as Spider-Woman, Ms. Marvel, and the Daughters of the Dragon, to name just a


THE BATTLE IS QUICKLY JOINED IN EARNEST. ORDINARILY, THE PURIFIERS WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE...
...BUT THIS NEAR ITS SOURCE, XAVIER'S MURDEROUS PSY-BEAM TAKES A TERRIBLE TOLL. THE X-MEN ARE LITERALLY DYING ON THEIR FEET.
THEY HAVE PRECIOUS LITTLE TIME TO STOP THEIR MENTOR

ART © 1983 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

few, has garnered him a reputation as "the" writer of women in comics.

Very few writers can maintain a solid interest in a series after eight years. Not only has Claremont not tired of *The X-Men*, the current growth of the direct sales market and Marvel's experimentation with different formats have afforded Claremont the opportunity to further explore the lives of his characters. With two graphic novels already to his credit, and not content to rest on the successful laurels of last summer's *Wolverine*, Claremont is still brimming with more stories to tell. This summer will see the release of the mini-series featuring Storm and Illyana, and later this year there will be another featuring Nightcrawler. Since the German-born X-Man is Dave Cockrum's favorite, the former *X-Men* artist and co-creator will have first dibs on pencilling the series. According to Claremont, "It was Dave saying that he would rip my lungs out if I gave it to anyone else—so he convinced us that maybe we should allow him to do it!" The mini-series is being planned as a pastiche of every well-known swashbuckler film with, quips Claremont, "style, excitement, adventure, love, romance, sex, violence, swords, beautiful women, swords, horseriders, swords, arcades and swords."

And why a Storm/Illyana mini-series? Basically, because there was a story to tell—and Claremont and editor Louise Jones feel that this is a good place to reveal what happened to Illyana during the seven years she was trapped in Belasco's limbo. As a longtime admirer of John Buscema's work, Claremont is looking forward to collaborating with the artist.

Claremont is also toying with the possibility of an Ariel/Wolverine mini-series, but this idea is still in its infancy and only one of many stories this prolific writer has yet to tell about his popular mutants.

After eight years, Claremont's ongoing relationship with the X-Men is not merely one of interest, but of love. "The X-Men are very real people to me," he admits, "and I live with them 24 hours a day. They are always on the fringes of my thoughts, no matter how much I try to divorce myself from them. It's a very awkward situation, because it inhibits the writer from doing those things to characters which must be done in order to keep the book dramatically viable—because it might be hurtful to the characters. You don't want to kill anyone off, you don't want to break their hearts, you don't want to hurt them. They're your friends! It's a catch-22 in a sense: one needs to have something of an emotional relationship with one's characters in order to create stories which involve the reader, and yet one must maintain a distance from them so that one can do the things to them and with them that need to be done in order to keep the stories both interesting and engrossing."

Chris Claremont at a recent New York convention.

Claremont cites this same kind of devotion as the reason behind Doug Moench's decision, last fall, to quit writing *Master of Kung Fu* (COMICS SCENE #7). "Whatever the pros and cons of the altercation with Jim Shooter, I think a large measure of Doug's decision was based on the fact that he had been writing *Master of Kung Fu* for eight or nine years, and had come to view the characters as very real people—as *friends*. And he was being asked to do something to them that would have disoriented the whole concept of the book and the characters. It would have destroyed them for him. It would have destroyed these people within whom Doug had invested, I think, time, effort, friendship and caring. He couldn't do it. He couldn't step back and be this emotionless god; he was a part of the book, rather than being apart from it."

THE CASE FOR PHOENIX

By the same token, Claremont was hurt by the decision that Phoenix must die. At the time, he was furious that the editorial system had broken down, feeling that he had "played the game by the rules and still gotten screwed." Though he gives a passing nod to the rationale behind the now-legendary events of *X-Men* #137, he still maintains that Phoenix cannot be held morally accountable for her consumption of the Shi'ar system and the resulting deaths of its five billion inhabitants. "My feeling about Jean at that point in her life,"

Paul Smith's *X-Men* reached new heights in popularity as the book received new, fresh energy.

WAS THAT DA OR WIFE, KATHA YES OR NO?
IF YOU ASK ME, PETS SHOULD KNOW THEIR PLACE AND DO AS THEY'RE TOLD
I WONDER IF SHE'LL FEAR THAT WAY ABOUT US
WOW! OROBO, YOU BELIEVE THAT? THAT'S INTELLIGENT?
WHO CAN SAY. JETTEN? WE KNOW TOO LITTLE ABOUT HIM. YOU'LL EVEN NOTICE S PULLED BACK IN A MOMENT OF HESITANCE IN BETWEEN
HE'S BEEN FED AN EVERYTHING ANIMA
DON'T WORRY, KITTY. MY MOM TAUGHT ME ALL ABOUT THE CARE AND FEEDING OF DRAGONS
PUNKARRO!
GOOD LUCK

Opposite: Samples of Claremont's work on last year's *X-Men* graphic novel which was exceptionally well-received by fans. The Brent Anderson artwork helped make the story special.

A look at the X-Men's leader by guest penciller Walt Simonson and team inker Bob Wiacek.

he explains, "is that she had been overwhelmed by forces totally beyond her control: she went from enhanced humanity to essentially the next best thing to God—in one leap. She evolved to a point, in the blink of an eye, where her slightest thought, conscious or subconscious, became reality.

"What many people failed to take into account—and it is perhaps my fault as writer," he acknowledges, "for not having emphasized it more—is that the action of the second half of *X-Men* #132 to the end of #136 occurs not only on the same day, but in a matter of three or four hours. The entire Dark Phoenix manifestation is an hour. She became Dark Phoenix, consumed D'bari, returned to earth and fought Xavier in maybe an hour of real time—which I think is hardly inconsistent. It would take her that long to come to grips with the forces that she was dealing with—that she was consumed by.

"If not for Jean, the whole universe would have been destroyed. OK, so she ate five billion asparagus. It wasn't her fault." In defense of Phoenix's actions, he cites the legal plea of *diminished capacity*. "It is used to denote those circumstances whereby the person was totally out of control but not insane. An analogy would be that if you woke someone up, if you walked into a room and shook someone who was known to be sound asleep and you woke them out of that sound sleep and they hit you over the head and broke your jaw or even killed you, they could not be held accountable for that act because they could technically be considered still asleep, and responding to those impulses that they were relating to while asleep, and dealing with you as part of the dream, not as a reality. This is an acceptable defense."

Nonetheless, Claremont feels that death was an easy way out for Jean. A far more severe punishment, the one he originally intended, would have been to strip Jean of her god-like powers and force her to live, remembering what she had done, and knowing that she could never atone for her actions. This, he feels, would have been a greater torment for someone as kind and decent as Jean. The editorial powers, however, ordained otherwise and Jean Grey was ultimately laid to rest. The question is . . . for how long?

Claremont is non-committal on this point. When a character dies, he insists, "it should *mean* something." He hopes, in his own writing, to maintain a certain respect for death and agrees that death loses its effectiveness as a dramatic tool when once-dead characters pop back to life in an almost offhand fashion. If anything, Jean's death has made him more protective of his characters and he doesn't want to see any of the others go the same way. Of course, this leaves the writer in somewhat of a bind: "If something like that doesn't happen again, won't that take away the inherent element of suspense? If you know from the beginning that nothing's going to happen to Superman or Batman or the Fantastic Four or Spider-Man, that so-and-so will live forever, then where's the suspense in the book? Who *cares* about what's going to happen?"

Though Claremont will admit to no definite plans for Phoenix's resurrection, he does concede that the Phoenix energy force, that which rises from the ashes, is not something which, in his opinion, can truly be extinguished. When pressed to comment on the similarity between Jean Grey and Cyclops' current love interest, Madelyne Pryor, Claremont advises only to keep reading! There's a certain twinkle playing about his eyes, but he won't reveal anything more. This summer's anniversary issue of the *X-Men* (#175) sheds some light on the mystery, as Claremont presents a most significant event in Cyclops' life, one which bodes an entirely new direction for the character and his current lady.

X-MAN NO MORE

Whatever profound changes Claremont has in store for Cyclops, one thing is for certain: the dark and brooding member of the X-Men will be dropped from the team roster. "I wanted to kind of close the book on the original team and make them Storm's group of X-Men, the *new* X-Men, the X-Men, and begin a sequence of events which will, in time, lead to them being replaced by a new group of X-Men. I also wanted to give him a happy ending—the poor son-of-a-bitch has had such a shitty life. I wanted to give him some happiness." Cyclops is, however, one of Claremont's favorite X-Men and certainly the character with whom he most closely identifies himself, and Claremont doesn't intend to dispense with him entirely, "because if I decided that he were to leave the X-Men permanently, he would probably end up in the Defenders—a fate worse than death," the writer bemoans, "and one that seems to be catching up with most of the other ex-X-Men!"

One character who will remain with the X-Men, despite rumors of his possible defection to John Byrne's *Alpha Flight*, is the Canadian-born Wolverine, whom Claremont sees as an integral part of his team of mutants. Though one of the most controversial characters in comicdom, given his reputation as a cold-blooded killer, Wolverine is emerging as more of a sensitive individual than might have been suspected—a facet of his personality which, Claremont maintains, is in keeping with his nature as a *samurai*, "the berserker with the poetic soul." According to Claremont, this is the essence of Wolverine's character. "Not that he's a samurai, but that he's a *failed* samurai. He could never be that which he desires. His goal in life is to attain that classic blend of tranquil violence that manifests itself in a samurai, and he can't, because he is a berserker. Every so often something in his head will snap and he will lose control. He is, in his own way, quite mad, but this is the only way he knows how to keep that certain madness in check."

This paradoxical side of the character

was, perhaps, most strikingly revealed in last summer's *Wolverine* mini-series. "The samurai aspect of it is something that Frank Miller and I agreed on right from the start," Claremont explains. "Neither of us were particularly enthused by him being described as a psycho killer, and the reason is that it's just so totally two-dimensional, and I have very little interest in two-dimensional characters. I've been integrating a Japanese aspect into him for years now, and it just seemed to us that this was a way to expand his character without sacrificing any of the other integral elements."

The Japanese tradition has, in fact, long influenced Claremont's writing and its cultural elements have permeated his work since his early days on *Iron Fist*. It is a society which fascinates him, and though he has never been to Japan, he is an avid reader of Japanese literature and a big fan of Japanese animation and comic books.

X-BABIES & BEYOND

In addition to his various X-Men projects, Claremont has recently embarked on yet another series, which features a new group of mutants and is, appropriately, entitled *The New Mutants*. He sees the "baby book" as evolving in a direction significantly different than that of its parent title. "*X-Men* is a book about superheroes who are mutants; that is to say, these are people who use their powers to preserve and defend the earth for a segment of humanity against various evil, nefarious forces. *The New Mutants* is a book about kids who wake up one morning and discover that they have powers and abilities that set them apart from normal men, and how they learn to cope with these abilities. It's a book about growing up; it's a book about children—young people. *X-Men* isn't. *X-Men* is an adventure series.

"The difference," he continues, "is that in each book the adventures grow out of the roles. In *X-Men*, the adventures grow out of the fact that they are much more aggressive—they go out and kick ass. The *X-Men* go looking for trouble and the *New Mutants* don't—or if they go looking for trouble, it's not of a superheroic kind."

Having left his own adolescence behind several years ago, how in tune is Claremont with today's teen-agers? "I think there are certain broad elements that are eternal," he answers, "the simplest of which is just to treat adolescents as human beings—as real people—as opposed to the picture you see generally in comic books and on television: as plot devices. In terms of specifics, it's merely a matter of observing the teen-agers around where I live; Louise Jones' daughter is the right age to be a New Mutant, as are her friends. We observe and follow our instincts. The idea is not to be a slavish copier of whatever trend is most fashionable at the moment—like valley girls—but to create an image of people that a kid, a teen-ager, can identify with: 'Yes, these people have problems just like me or the same problems that I have.' Much like I did when I first read Marvel comics: I was impressed as hell by Spider-Man, because his life was even more screwed up than mine was! He didn't have any better luck at sorting out his problems than I had with mine."

Adolescence is traditionally a time of rebellion and though Claremont doesn't want to do stock rebellion, he does plan to explore that aspect as well as the fact of puberty and the emotional turbulence it generates. The New Mutants range in age from 13 to 19, with Xi'an Coy Manh (a.k.a. Karma) being the eldest of the group, and all are at the stage where, Claremont smilingly admits, "their hormones are kicking into gear!" One idea the writer is working on involves Xavier finding what he thinks is a mutant, a young girl who, it turns out, is pregnant, and the mutant is her baby. "The idea would be that Xavier's got to teach the kid while it's still in the womb, before it destroys its mother. Or the question could be: Suppose it's a physically deformed mutant in the sense that Nightcrawler is. What does Xavier do then? Does he abort the child? All sorts of interesting questions could be raised." Claremont adds that the storyline is only speculative at this point and whether it ever sees print will depend on editorial policy and the restrictions of the Comics Code.

The parent/child theme runs through much of Claremont's writing. He sees Storm and Kitty as mother/daughter archetypes and has further explored parental relationships with Maraca and her protegee, Arianrhod, as well as with Cyclops and his father, Corsair. It is a theme he feels is integral to *The New Mutants* and he will continue to develop it in the series. Where Stevie Hunter and, to some extent, Xavier function as surrogate parents for the team, readers will also meet the mothers of both Cannonball and Sunspot in upcoming issues.

Though *The New Mutants* deals with a team of adolescents, Claremont is determined to avoid directing the book at any specific age group. While he recognizes the danger of "writing down," he claims that style has, in the past, soured him on other writers, and he doubts he'll fall prey to those same condescending attitudes so long as he continues to treat his characters seriously and with respect.

CLAREMONT'S FUTURE

Comics occupy a great portion of his life at this point, but Claremont hopes to expand his interests to other forms, such as novels and screenplays. The Canadian company, Nelvana, has indicated that they would like to have the writer work with them in an advisory capacity on the upcoming live-action *X-Men* movie, though he isn't sure how much real input he'll have into the film. Nelvana bought the rights in

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GUESS WHO'S GOING TO COLOR!
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the spring of '82 but has only recently sent their treatment to Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. As he understands it, the X-Men slated for movie superstardom are Storm, Cyclops, Phoenix, Ariel, Wolverine, and Professor Xavier. Because Nelvana will not be attempting the Dark Phoenix storyline, Claremont expects the film to have a happy ending, though details are still nebulous at the moment.

Claremont is open to exploring other interests, yet the field of comics still provides him with challenge and excitement. He feels fortunate to have worked with many of the best artists in the business, including John Byrne, Frank Miller, Walt Simonson, and Michael Golden among others, and is currently looking forward to collaborating with Barry Smith on a story for *Epic Illustrated*. He's very enthusiastic about working with X-Men penciller Paul Smith and feels that they mesh well as a creative team and he looks forward to collaborating with the X-Men's latest penciller, John Romita, Jr. As to other artists he hopes to work with someday, these include "Brian Bolland, Steve Dillon, Lela Dowling, Dave Stevens, Ken Steacy, Dave Sim, Berni Wrightson, Mike Kaluta, Neal Adams. . . a big list," he concludes.

Seen as a superstar by many fans, Claremont is often deluged by admirers at various conventions. "Eighty to 90 percent of them are charming," he says, "exciting, have a lot of fun, good to talk to, a trip, and ego-boo. Ten percent of them make you want to rip their lungs out." Ultimately, he avows, "Superstardom ain't all it's cracked up to be. What being a superstar means is that you're a target, basically. No one gave a shit about X-Men when it was a minor league book; no one wanted to go out and parody it or me, or do companions and compendiums about it. But once you've achieved a certain degree of fame . . . we are now fair game for anybody out there."

Claremont himself has felt the satirist's sting on several occasions, most recently in the pages of First Comics' *E-Man* #2-3, scripted by Marty Pasko, who cast him in the persona of Ford Fairmont, leader of the unhappy F-Men. "An honest attempt at writing humor," Claremont concedes.

Canadian artist Dave Sim has parodied much of the Marvel universe—and Claremont is no exception, having been introduced in Sim's *Cerebus* as "Professor Charles X. Claremont" only to be snuffed out between two copulating muck-monsters in issue #25 of the title! Not only did he enjoy his erotic death, he recalls, "I enjoyed the whole story in *Cerebus*. If you've got to go. . . . What I'm waiting to see is Dave, in his infinite wisdom, doing a Phoenix-like resurrection. My admiration for Dave Sim holds no bounds," he adds. "I enjoy *Cerebus* as I enjoy very few books. I was hoping from the start, having been an *E-Man* fan since it first came out, that I could say the same about it. C'est la vie."

The road to fame is not, it seems, without its toll. Claremont remains undaunted, however, by the bite of satire and shrugs off the sometimes vicious attacks of his critics with ease. He is, after all, Marvel's bestselling writer, a true professional who cares deeply about his work, imparting the same love for his characters that is shared by all of fandom, living and breathing his many stories with a rare passion that fuels his success. ■

Next issue: It's Chris Claremont on sex and death.

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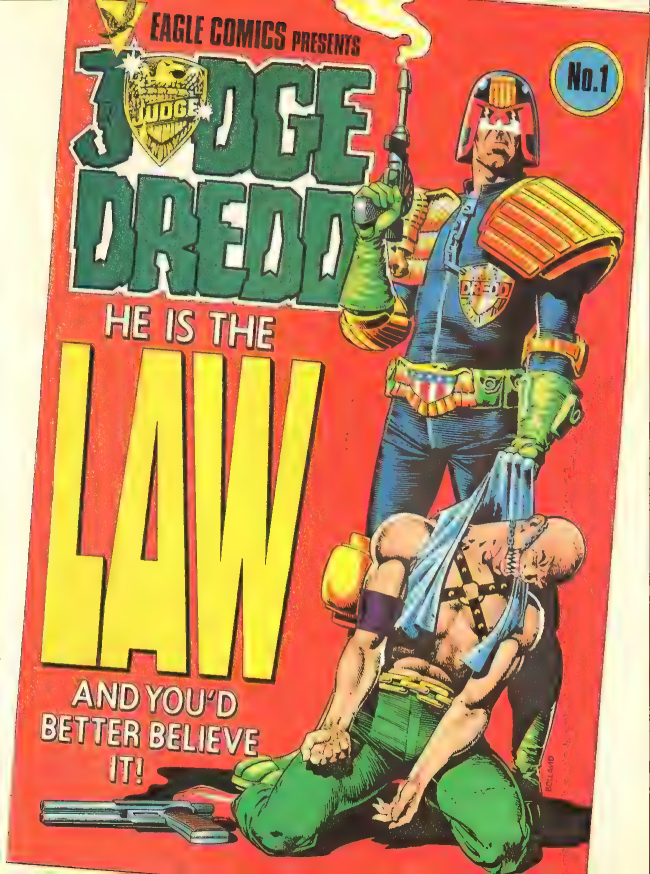
BUT Mr PIERCE IS MY BOSS YOU WANT HIM, YOU'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME
NOT BAD, KIDDO YOU'D'A FLATTENED ANY NORMAL GUY.
BUT WE AIN'T NORMAL.
WE WERE ONCE--'TIL A MUTIE NAMED WOLVERINE CUT US TO RIBBONS--NEAR KILLED US!
NOW WE'RE BIONIC--PART MEN, PART MACHINE--SUPER-FAST, AGILE, TOUGH AN' STRONG!
AN' WE HATE MUTIES!

The New Mutants may appear to be cashing in on the current "X-craze," but the stories are popular and the Bob McLeod art, seen here from the graphic novel, helps make the book stand out.

Preview

Here Comes the Judge!

This is Judge Dredd, one of a legion of Judges patrolling Mega-City One in a not-too-distant future. He's the most honest, fairest and law-abiding of the Judges and has as many enemies as friends. *Judge Dredd* **first appeared in England's weekly science fiction comics, 2000 A.D. on March 5, 1977. Since then he has been gaining in popularity around the world. Now, Titan Books' Eagle Comics imprint will deliver the Judge to America in late July as a monthly comic book. The first four issues will feature Brian Bolland's artwork, since his work is the best known among the Dredd artists. In England, however, Mike McMahon is the acknowledged expert on the Judges.**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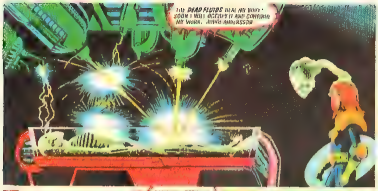

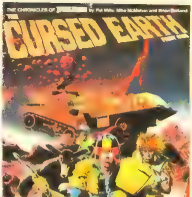

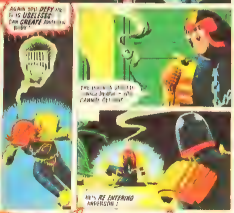
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THE PSYCHICS SPECIALLY MADE TO FIGHT - AND EARNED OUR LOVE!
WE'RE ENTERING HYPERSPACE!

YOU'RE A BLIND MAN, DREDD. THIS IS PURE LIQUID NITROGEN! WITHOUT SPECIAL DRUGS YOU CAN'T SURVIVE A DIRECT BLAST!
AND I'LL FREEZE TO DEATH IF I STAY HERE MUCH LONGER!

Americans have only been able to enjoy Dredd's adventures courtesy of Titan's trade paperback collections, such as the Cursed Earth stories. Since those were only available in limited quantity, the next logical step became a regular American comic. It will be in the standard 32-page, Mundo format for $1. The art on these pages is from the first issue and should give you some taste for the adventure and politics in the Judge's world.

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Guest Spot

What Ratings...? By Whom...?

Will rating the comics work? And if not, what can the companies do instead?

By DICK GIORDANO

Dick Giordano has become one of the most well-respected creative talents in the industry. He has worked as a penciller and inker since the early 1950s, going on to edit the Charlton superhero titles in the mid-'60s. He joined DC in 1968, where he helped revitalize their line. After freelancing once again, Giordano rejoined DC, first as an editor, then managing editor. His promotion to vice-president-executive editor came just last fall. Giordano's personal goal is to expand the number of genres used in comics publishing, while always searching for excellence, be it from established professionals or struggling new talents. As a teacher, he has helped train some of today's most notable inkers, including Terry Austin, Bob Layton, Josef Rubinstein and Klaus Janson.

"The comic book morality crisis is not far off . . . I propose that we act now, while we can still do so, simply and effectively, without outside interference."

So wrote Jan Strnad in a recent Guest Spot (CS #10) in which he expressed his concern about the trend in some comics today towards a loosening of standards and a greater incidence of graphic violence, nudity, sex and strong language. He concludes, with reason, that these trends, obviously disturbing to him, will inevitably lead to pressure being brought to bear on the comics publishers by either the government or independent groups of concerned parents and citizens.

I would first like to say that while I do not consider this outside interference to be inevitable by any stretch of the imagination, I agree fully that we should not take the threat of such interference lightly. It is a real threat, a real probability and I hope that all other publishers recognize this fact and join DC Comics and me in keeping our collective heads out of the sand. Having said that, I must now state that I disagree with many of Jan's other statements. And most definitely I disagree with his proposal of a rating system and its "simplicity." To my mind, nothing could be more difficult to implement and has a lesser chance of success than such a proposal. The notion of adapting the motion picture rating system to comics is not without merit but it is, unfortunately, an impractical notion, almost impossible to implement, and, even if it were used, would not necessarily achieve the desired ends.

"The ratings would be assigned by the publishers themselves, to their own titles according to a set of published guidelines without the need for a review board."

Simple? Hardly. The questions raised by this statement would take the wisdom of Solomon to answer. First, who would write the guidelines that would be published? How would we get all the publishers to agree to one set of guidelines? How would we write guidelines so precise that one publisher couldn't interpret them differently from another publisher? Whose sense of morality would they be based on? My sense of morality is much different from Jan's, and his from yours. Secondly, without a review board of disinterested third parties (such as the review board in the film industry, from whom we are "borrowing" this ratings system) the ratings applied by publishers would be meaningless. Without oversight, I can easily envision a scenario wherein a publisher misuses (with self-justification, of course) the rating system to gain a competitive advantage. After the fact, he will apologize for the lapse, but a war of one-upmanship could easily develop to no one's benefit. If we're depending on the public's perception of the ratings as dependable for the system to succeed, the damage done would be irreparable.

So, okay . . . we probably couldn't establish guidelines or assign ratings by ourselves. Who could and not be "outside interference?" You've got me!

Dick Giordano at his DC office.

PHOTO - 1983 DC COMICS INC.

Let's say we *could* do all this. Can you visualize a night clerk at a 7-11 store looking for a rating on a comic brought to his cash register and then asking his potential customer for an I.D. . . . and then telling him he must put the comic back if he doesn't produce proof-of-age? Do you think that kid's parent will have confidence in a rating system that doesn't prevent his child from being exposed to "naked women in the guise of superheroines?" Nope. That parent would probably lead the lynch party. How about newsstands or comic shops or department stores? How would you get them to cooperate? Since nothing else in those places would be rated, there would be the need to establish a new in-store system. It would be easier to throw the comics out or only accept "G"s. Then they would have no problem. But we would. For that matter, we wouldn't have real access to newsstand operators to even inform them that the ratings exist. We *do* have good access to the comic ships with information of this kind but my guess would be that since it would be voluntary (we couldn't enforce it anyway) and each individual dealer would have to make a judgment call on standards of the community he serves, we could not depend upon full compliance.

To sum up, ratings wouldn't work unless **where** were oversight capabilities (a review board) to insure compliance, every publisher (or nearly every) agreed to the standards and oversight procedures, an apparatus was put in place to insure compliance by comic sellers and a well-thought-out publicity campaign were mounted to inform the public of our actions. Hardly simple tasks, these. It would take years and many dollars and even if all this could be accomplished. . .

. . . it still may accomplish *nothing!*

All that is needed is a small band of self-righteous "concerned" citizens to come together and decide that what's really wrong with their kids is comic books and that they're going to make things right in the world. That's always how witch hunts begin. And the best part is you don't even have to be a *real* witch! Just someone to *call* a witch. And a bunch of other people will agree because it's easier to burn the witch than to look for the real cause for alarm. Remember, some of these same concerned citizens (who claim that the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote cartoons are too violent for children) applied a great deal of pressure to the TV networks and the result is the pap now seen on Saturday morning TV. And they did not need the help of local law enforcement officers or a court of law to accomplish their ends . . . they did it all by themselves. The Supreme Court of the United States can't legally define pornography, but these folks can do away with what *they* perceive to be harmful, cartoon violence . . . POOF . . . just like that! Ratings voluntarily put on the covers at the publishers' discretion will prove to be no obstacle to determined, concerned citizens. The ratings would be brushed aside like crumbs from a table.

Then we're doomed, right? No, not really. There are a few courses of action open to us that either separately, or combined, might allow us to head them off at the pass. We could form a new *Comic Magazine Association of America*, have it create a new Comics Code—one more in tune with contemporary standards . . . one with real teeth in it. Invite *all* publishers (alternatives and majors alike) to join and participate in the CMAA, such participation not being contingent upon subscribing to the Comics Code. If all the publishers talked to each other, helped each other solve industry-wide problems, worked together to alter public perceptions of our industry, pooled their knowledge, energies and resources in the areas of public relations, community service and industry promotion, the possibility of outside interference would be greatly reduced, if not totally eliminated. I really don't agree with Jan Strnad on this point at all. The Comics Code was *not* a dumb idea in the '50s . . . it saved the comics industry. And although *that* Code might be a dumb idea now, a new Comics Code would work wonders if it were conceived and administered in a well-planned, thoughtful and dynamic fashion. This would actually be easier to do than adapting the movie rating system. The apparatus is already in place. All it needs to really start functioning is an influx of new blood . . . the newer publishers.

Another plan, one that we at DC are committed to, is still easier to implement since it requires no action on anyone else's part but ours and, if successful, serves only our needs. We are going to create a Code of our own . . . a policy statement that will outline our standards of good taste. It will set guidelines for our artists and writers, it will clearly define that which we consider acceptable and that which we don't for our readers, their parents and the public at large.

Though the specifics of this Code or standards of good taste haven't yet been fully delineated, it is going to be based on a simple but workable tenet: mature story themes need to be based on reality, even if elements of fantasy are present. If we are to deal, then, with real human behavior, in realistic settings, we must acknowledge the presence of violence, sex, strong language and nudity in the real world. These subjects may be handled in our mature storylines so long as they are treated with intelligence, insight, and yes, maturity. Gratuitous use of these subjects will not be acceptable. Our job is to entertain, perhaps in some small way to inform, but not to titillate.

In addition, we have already decided on the basic elements of three separate and distinct cover formats to be affixed on titles targeted for three separate and distinct age group audiences. And no, you won't see "For Adults Only" on any of them. That would be an insult to the intelligence of just about everybody. Adulthood is difficult to define. Certainly age alone doesn't do it . . . the age of majority is different in different states in any case, and age is a pretty inaccurate way to determine when a human being is ready for anything, especially when he can read a comic book. Anyway, our plan is to create one cover format that will appeal most to the more mature reader. All the elements on this cover will state that it is different and more mature. (Not sexy and violent . . . *mature*.) The production values will be higher, typically the price will be higher (pricing it out of the reach of some youngsters) and the graphics will further distinguish it from the masses. Our second format will be the traditional one, with some minor changes, that everyone is familiar with and it will be aimed at the middle age group of the market we now serve. And of course, the third cover format will fairly scream out that this is a comic for our youngest audience.

Our hope is that these distinctive cover formats will make the selection process of our readers a natural one. Putting a "For Adults Only" blurb on the cover only insures that every 10-year-old in town will be dying to get his hands on this "illicit" comic book. Making it appeal to him less by use of a more mature cover design should be far more effective. . . .

In conclusion, I guess it's safe to say that though I don't believe that *any* action taken by the comics publishers is certain to eliminate criticism or fend off outside interference, we can, at least, insure that the criticism, if it comes, is unwarranted. If we take our responsibilities to our readers and our communities seriously we can face that criticism with clean hands . . . and without a *G*, *PG*, *R* or *X* anywhere in sight. ■

> "If we are to deal, then, with real human behavior, in realistic settings, we must acknowledge the presence of violence, sex, strong language and nudity in the real world."

Cary Bates
17 Years With the Man of Steel

A conversation about keeping up with Superman and writing other American heroes.

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

Tucked away in a corner of Continuity Associates' offices, Cary Bates works in a small, wood panelled office with his word processor. On one wall is a movie poster from the French version of *Superman the Movie* and within reach of his desk is a stack of comics and magazines including foreign editions of *Superman* and *The Flash*. He's rather comfortable in his surroundings, about as comfortable as he is with these two superheroes. Then again, it's hard not to be comfortable with people with whom you've spent 17 years.

Bates, a tall, thin writer now in his 30s, was one of two writers to start a new generation which began to change the face of comics in the 1960s. Along with Jim Shooter, Bates managed to make sales to Mort Weisinger, then the Superman family editor. It was the last decade of what many now call the Weisinger-era, when gimmicks sold the comics, not deep characterizations or continued stories. There was precious little of either in 1966, when Bates made his first story sale. Since then, he has written the adventures of Superman, Superboy, the Legion of Super-Heroes and Supergirl, plus an uninterrupted 12-year run on The Flash.

In addition, Bates has taken on two comic strip assignments: *Buck Rogers* and *The Lone Ranger*. Currently, he is scripting some of the most important figures in American pop culture.

But Bates isn't just a comics writer. "I've always tried to think of myself as a screenwriter who happened to write comic books," Bates admits. In 1974, he sold a treatment for *Mourn Love* to Albert Broccoli, the mastermind behind the James Bond film series. "It was Ian Fleming's title but a totally original story. They bought it, and there were story elements in it that were similar to *The Spy who Loved Me*. By the time they bought it, *Spy* was already in production. I don't know how soon it will happen, but I *want* to be a screenwriter."

It was this combination of talents which made Bates the perfect choice to act as DC's representative to the Salkind organization during the production of *Superman III*. The screenplay by David and Leslie Newman, Bates explains, had certain elements in it that concerned DC, most importantly the addition of a divorce and child to Lana Lang's life.

SUPERMAN OF THE MOVIES

"There was talk for a while that we would ask them to give Lana Lang a new name," he continued, "but I think the final decision was that DC may or may not someday show that Lana did *indeed* get married when she was in Europe. She is now divorced and her son is living with his father in Europe. It's an untold story, a chapter in her past that has never been revealed. We felt it would be cheating the audience to have Clark go back to Smallville for his high school reunion and have him meet some *other* redhead."

It was Bates who initially removed Lana from the Superman supporting cast in *Lois Lane* #109 in 1971. "I don't think it was conceived as a permanent move when it was written," Bates said, "and I guess I didn't miss her because I was writing Superboy all that time so I was still dealing with the character."

Bates was sent to London and had a meeting with the Newmans to discuss DC's concerns over Lana and other points. "When it comes to things like dialogue, well, the Newmans are brilliant at that. Line for line, the dialogue was great."

Meanwhile, the David Odell script, for the Supergirl film, DC hopes, will finally solidify the Kara history and keep the character consistent. Over the years she has been seen in the comics as an orphan, a high school student, a college student, a TV reporter in San Francisco, a college counselor in Miami, a soap opera star in New York and, currently, a college student in Chicago. That final designation is where we will find Supergirl in the film, which stars 19-year-old Helen Slater, in the title role, Faye Dunaway, Mia Farrow, Peter O'Toole and Brenda Vaccaro.

The origin itself, Bates says, "has some changes but the overall idea is the same. There will be a few liberties taken with Argo City in its conception. I think they worked around the problem of Superman [Christopher Reeve] not being there pretty well."

"By definition, *Supergirl* is a tougher movie to pull off than *Superman* because people who don't read comics will probably think it's a way of cashing in on the Superman character. Three *Superman* movies are a tough act to follow."

THROUGH THE YEARS

The Superman family of comics has changed a great deal since Bates started scripting for them. These days, there is an almost complete reversal in editorial philosophy. When Bates began writing for Mort Weisinger, gimmicks were the key. "He would focus attention away from the Superman character and make you more interested in who the new survivor of Krypton was. To Mort, characterization for Lois was her going through 100 pairs of scissors in a year trying to cut Clark's hair.

"All the major elements seen in the movies and all the things they would like to do in the future are all Mort Weisinger devices. When Mario Puzo first came to the DC offices to research, he kept coming up with these Mort Weisinger plot points to put in his story."

These days, the two main Superman comics, *Superman* and *Action Comics*, have intertwined subplots, similar to the successful formula used in the Batman titles which has also found great success with Marvel's Spider-Man trio (see COMICS SCENE #8). The challenge excites Bates, who is now able to take everything he has learned from editors Weisinger and Julie Schwartz and apply them in new ways. "What I'm trying to do now," he explains, "is still retain the good elements of what Mort did — being original with new plots or new situations — and still concentrate on the characterizations of not only Superman, but Clark Kent and the entire supporting cast. I'm trying to do the best of the old with the best of the new."

The sub-plots run through the two books although the main stories remain separate, as evidenced by the recent stories about Luthor in *Action* and Brainiac in *Superman*. Despite the revitalized villains, it's the sub-plots involving Perry White's marital woes, Lana's relationship with Clark, and Lois' own romantic entanglements that seem to interest the readers more. "The letters tell us the kids are more interested in the various sub-plots than the so-called main plot.

"I think that's true of all comics in general," Bates observes. "The continued storyline has pretty much become the norm now. Self-contained stories are now the exception. Because of the continued storyline format, we're able to get into much more detail and have much more insight into the characters. It makes it more interesting for me and the reader to be involved with."

Unlike Doug Moench on the Batman titles, there are two writers for the Superman books. Bates is now the *Superman* scripter after many years of writing the feature in *Action*. The change was

mads to reflect Bates' place with the Man of Steel. For a while, many other writers wrote the Superman title, but it was Bates who kept on the book month after month. Now he's working with Action scribe Marv Wolfman, both in conjunction with editor Julie Schwartz.

"It's difficult because our schedules are such that neither one of us could do both and really do the job as well as we're doing now. It's a lot of trouble, but I think it's worth it. Each one of us starts something and there's something written down so both of us keep informed, knowing how far the storyline has progressed. It's all been discussed generally, but the specifics really come out in the writing. We have to keep in constant touch as a result and Julie's pretty good at that. I think Superman has always been too big a character, appearing in too many comics, for any one writer to handle," Bates adds.

One of Bates' strengths is as a plotter, and his ability to weave sub-plots throughout a multi-issue story has become an industry hallmark. An example of this is a two-part story that saw print a few years ago—the return of Pa Kent. Its emotional impact prompted scores of readers to write in and the editors voted it into their *Year's Best* digest for 1980.

He has turned this writing skill into a major asset, adapting the two-hour *Superman III* script into a 48-page comic, now available in comics shops. "To do the movie properly," Bates says, "I would have needed a 64-page book. It was easy in one sense — I could just take out many of the Gus Gorman scenes because obviously, for a Superman comic, you couldn't take out any of his scenes. I tried to preserve the Newmans' dialogue wherever possible, so I would say over half the dialogue is almost directly from the script. It doesn't read like the average Superman story."

In terms of the art, Bates teamed up with long-time *Superman* penciller Curt Swan who, in turn, was inked by Sal Amendola. Christopher Reeve asked for some panels to be altered, making the Swan Superman look more like the cinematic Man of Steel. "Sal inks Curt really well," comments Bates. "It's unlike anything I've seen."

One other difference between the Superman of the comics and the Superman of the silver screen is experience. "I think the film Superman is Superman in his first years at Metropolis. He's still learning. This is probably true in the first two films especially. Also, the Superman in the movies has more of a sense of discovery about himself, while our Superman, because he's been around for 45 years, always seems to have more knowledge. In some ways, that it is almost a detriment. He's been at it for so long that it is difficult to come up with a valid way for him to learn anything about himself. That's a problem the filmmakers don't have until *Superman XIX*.

"One of the things ignored by most of the writers, myself included, was that almost every Superboy adventure was going to be a learning experience. There were also his parents who served as teachers. I tried to use these elements in the last three or four years I wrote the series—trying to come up with stories that could not substitute Superman for Superboy. Also, you can get away with far less action in Superboy

OF COURSE, IT WOULD BE NO CONTEST IF I ACCELERATED TO SUPER-SPEED VELOCITIES!
BUT ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, TO SAY THE SK PASSED US FIRST IS AT RIGHT WITH SOARING COLORS!
EXCUSE US, LOIS... BUT MY FAVORITE CO-ANCHORWOMAN AND I HAVE TO HUSTLE AND REPORT TO MAKE-UP FOR TONIGHT'S SIX O'CLOCK NEWS!
LEAD ON, LANA! ALTHOUGH FROM WHERE I'M STANDING, YOUR MAKE-UP LOOKS JUST FINE!
PHOTO © 1981 DC COMICS INC.
SUPERMAN ® & © 1980 DC COMICS INC.

Left and right: samples of Curt Swan's work on Superman; always exciting and human. The right panel shows the new relationship between Lana Lang and Clark Kent. Below: the Super Computer blasts its creator, Gus Gorman, near the film's climax.

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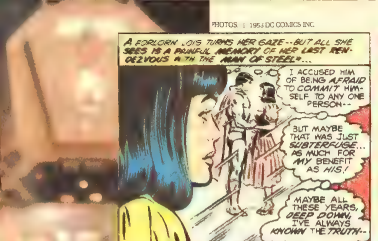
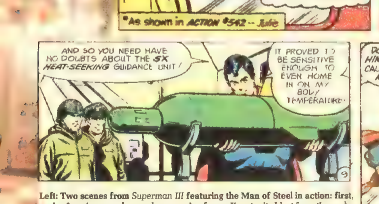
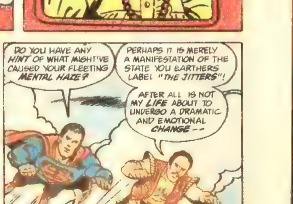
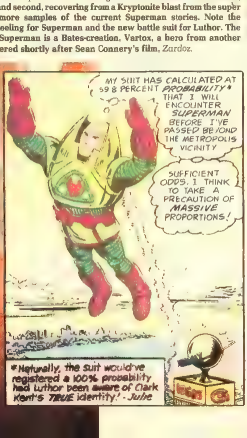

A FOOLISH JOIS THINKS HER GAZE--BUT ALL SHE SEES IS A PAINFUL MEMORY OF HER LAST RENDEZVOUS WITH THE MAN OF STEEL*...
I ACCUSED HIM OF BEING AFRAID TO COMMIT HIMSELF TO ANY ONE PERSON--
BUT MAYBE THAT WAS JUST SUBTERFUGE... AS MUCH FOR MY BENEFIT AS HIS!
MAYBE ALL THESE YEARS, DEEP DOWN, I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN THE TRUTH--
*As shown in ACTION #542 -- Jake

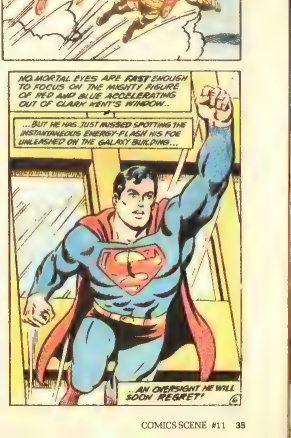
-A ROMANCE WITH SUPERMAN CAN NEVER GROW INTO ANYTHING DEEPER... AND THE PROSPECT OF MARRIAGE ONE DAY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FANTASY! MY FANTASY NOT MINE!


AND SO YOU NEED HAVE NO DOUBTS ABOUT THE SEX MEAT-SEEKING GUIDANCE UNIT!
IT PROVED TO BE SENSITIVE ENOUGH TO EVEN HOME IN ON MY BODY TEMPERATURE!


DO YOU HAVE ANY HINT OF WHAT MIGHT'VE CAUSED YOUR FLEETING MENTAL HAZE?
PERHAPS IT IS MERELY A MANIFESTATION OF THE STATE YOU EARTHERS LABEL "THE JITTERS"!
AFTER ALL IS NOT MY LIFE ABOUT TO UNDERGO A DRAMATIC AND EMOTIONAL CHANGE--

Left: Two scenes from *Superman III* **featuring the Man of Steel in action: first, saving Lana's son and second, recovering from a Kryptonite blast from the super computer. Right: more samples of the current Superman stories. Note the changes in Lois's feeling for Superman and the new battle suit for Luthor. The gent flying with Superman is a Bates-creation, Vartox, a hero from another galaxy who premiered shortly after Sean Connery's film,** *Zardoz*.


MY SUIT HAS CALCULATED AT 99.8 PERCENT PROBABILITY* THAT I WILL ENCOUNTER SUPERMAN BEFORE I'VE PASSED BEYOND THE METROPOLIS VICINITY
SUFFICIENT ODDS, I THINK TO TAKE A PRECAUTION OF MASSIVE PROPORTIONS!
*Naturally, the suit would've registered a 100% probability had Luthor been aware of Clark Kent's TRUE identity! - Jake


NO MORTAL EYES ARE FAST ENOUGH TO FOCUS ON THE MIGHTY FIGURE OF RED AND BLUE ACCELERATING OUT OF CLARK KENT'S WINDOW...
...BUT HE HAS JUST MISSED SPOTTING THE INSTANTANEOUS ENERGY FLASH HIS FOE UNLEASHED ON THE GALAXY BUILDING...
AN OVERSIGHT HE WILL SOON REGRET!

because it has that feeling of nostalgia which is probably the closest we come to a throwback to the Weisinger years. You just can't change the Superboy character as radically as you can other characters. Superboy is much harder to write, in some ways, than Superman."

STRIP STORIES

Although Bates feels he would like to try his hand at a Batman story sometime, he has little interest in writing the adventures of any other established hero. "I would probably create a new character before writing another well-known one. The next thing would be to create a character, something I haven't done yet," Bates says.

Until then, he's more than content to divide his time between comic books and comic strips. Several years back, the New York Times Syndicate asked Bates to script their revived *Lone Ranger* strip, to coincide with the Universal film release. "I had no experience but I started doing the *Ranger* and learning how to do a comic strip along the way. It is quite different from comic books," he says.

Bates had written eight weeks' worth of the strip while the syndicate looked for an artist and the film struggled to get finished. A variety of artists including Russ Heath and Gil Kane were in line for the slot. Heath finally got the nod. Meanwhile, the

(Continued on page 63)

THE FLASH ® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC.

The scene that starts the ball rolling. Bates says he wants *The Flash* to be thoroughly unpredictable.

In May, the Flash killed his arch-enemy, the Reverse-Flash, in an attempt to stop his bride-to-be, Fiona Webb, from being murdered. The Scarlet Speedster was booked for the crime and released on his own recognizance, pending trial.

What's happening is something new to DC, according to Cary Bates. The stories are becoming less predictable and the characters are being taken through paces most readers would never expect. "We all decided that since *The Flash* is one of the old-timers, he should have the rule book thrown out and have different things happen to him," Bates explained.

"It all started about a year ago when then-editor Ernie Colon suggested the Flash go to jail for murder. I first heard that and said, 'Oh, come on. . .' but then I thought about it some more and the fact that it did sound inconceivable was the best reason to do it." The seeds for the current storyline were planted towards the end of last year and now everyone is being primed to experience a turbulent year for the Flash.

"We're going to use real time in this," Bates continued, "so that while his case is pending, he'll still have his adventures, marked with the stigma of being charged with the crime. It will constantly be brought up through the media and the other characters he gets involved with. Once the actual trial starts, that will run for several issues. Along the way, many things will happen that obviously could never happen before."

Bates sat down and thoroughly plotted the long storyline, figuring out which characters will react as supporters or detractors. He even conferred with Justice League of America editor Len Wein, to figure out who the Flash could count on as allies. His nephew, Wally West (Kid Flash), will figure prominently later in the story, although it's just a cameo. We'll also see what happens to the bride left at the altar and the alter ego of the Fastest Man Alive.

"I don't know how things could get worse for him but they will," Bates asserted.

"Once this major storyline gets resolved and its impact has been felt, how do you top it? I've already started thinking about it. I think what will happen will be similar to what the soap operas do. I watched one for about a year just to see how they do it. Just as you're in the throes of one story, they're starting to insert a new plotline. As plot A is resolved, you've reached a crisis point in plot B—and you keep watching.

"You must keep it perpetuating; that's something we're going to try and do with *The Flash*."

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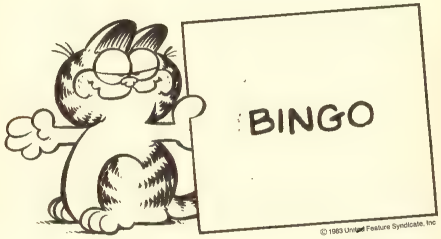

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Thought Balloons

Messages from a Curmudgeon

Beginning a brand-new column with a look at universes.

By MARTIN PASKO

Allow me to introduce myself. I am a curmudgeon.

My dictionary defines a curmudgeon as an irascible, churlish person. I use the term facetiously, of course; I don't really consider myself cranky or misanthropic. I'm a curmudgeon in the Cleveland Amory sense—that of the lone dissenter in an otherwise unanimous opinion. To give a comparatively trivial example, I'm the only person I know who loathed E.T., the *Extraterrestrial* (I figure it's best not to discuss my politics; no point in getting the hate mail started so soon). I tell you all this as fair warning: the opinions you read in this column will probably be opinions with which you violently disagree. Or, at the very least, opinions you aren't likely to see expressed in another comics-related publication. Either way, I think you're in for some provocative reading.

Since nonconformity is no longer a virtue in The Idiot Eighties, the curmudgeon is not a role I play gleefully, nor an image I seek to cultivate. The label is simply the price I pay for being true to my convictions. So, you may be asking, who the hell asked me for my opinion, anyway? COMICS SCENE's Editor, Bob Greenberger, that's who.

If you've already read the table of contents in this issue, you've noticed that

ART © 1986 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Marvel's *Official Handbook*. **"You practically need to memorize each character's genealogy to understand what's going on."**

Howard Cruse has departed these pages. Howard recently found himself so overworked with freelance illustratio nassignments that he was forced to give up his column, "Loose Cruse." In casting about for a replacement columnist, Bob remembered my "Guest Spot" in issue #6 and the minor furor that piece stirred up. So, maybe Bob figured a curmudgeon like me would make controversial and fascinating addition to the roster of regular COMICS SCENE contributors.

That, of course, is for you to decide.

* * * *

My "Guest Spot" in issue #6 implied that the "direct-sale" comics outlets, which are rapidly becoming the principal means by which comics are distributed, could herald a renaissance of innovation and experimentation in four-color comics because their patrons are predominantly comic book fans. "For the first time in its history," I wrote, "the comic book industry is no longer encumbered by a 'lowest common denominator' mentality. . . .Now, at long last, the majority of comics can aspire to the originality you always knew they could."

It would be premature to say that it isn't working out that way. Qualitative considerations aside, I'm somewhat encouraged by the announcement or release of titles such as *Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld*, *Cryster*, *Thriller*, *Mars* and *American Flagg*. They're different in the sense that, unlike *Alpha Flight* or *Vigilante*, they are not spin-offs from established books or reworkings of old trademarks. Still, I can't help but wonder if we won't all grow old waiting for a renaissance.

Maybe I'm too impatient, but I must confess to being depressed by the lukewarm market acceptance greeting most of First Comics', Pacific's and Eclipse's lines as of this writing. By the criterion I just mentioned, those companies' books are certainly different. They must be; the so-called alternative companies don't have 30 monthly titles from which to spin off a 31st, nor do they have 30 years' worth of old concepts from which to borrow. Among comic book "insiders," the popular explanation for the absence of a monster hit from the "alternates" (so far) is that very few of those companies' books are straight superhero titles. Certainly, such developments as the recent cancellation of virtually DC's entire mystery line strengthen that argument.

And yet I wonder whether there isn't more to the story.

I keep hearing readers at conventions and comic book shops saying that they only read the titles produced by one particular company. And I read angry letters in the fanzines whenever a writer or artist who had worked exclusively for one publisher begins working for another—letters in which words like "defector" and "traitor" are bandied about.

The concept of "brand loyalty" applying to comic books is probably not new, but I have to confess it's new to me. As a comic book reader, there was for me only one criterion for buying or not buying a comic book: does it look interesting? The idea of basing my comic book purchases on the publisher's imprint would have been as unthinkable as choosing a record album on the basis of its label.

Now you're confused, right? On the one hand, I seem to be saying that one reason why the alternative comics may be "slow starters" is their fear of their titles are about superheroes. But on the other hand, I seem to be suggesting that the problem is a market resistance to anything that isn't DC or Marvel.

Not exactly. I repeat: there's more to the story. Stay with me. I'm going to recount three anecdotes that will help me make my point.

Anecdote One: I recently completed a year-and-a-half of writing the adventures of a certain swamp monster for one of the major publishers. During that time, the editor suggested repeatedly that I add a "guest-star" to one of the stories and add other elements which would more obviously relate the character to the publisher's "universe." I was reluctant to do this because I didn't want to compromise the discrete morally ambiguous universe I had created for the character, to accommodate the inclusion of superheroes, whose milieu tends to be dinfermed by a simplistic, Good Guys-Vs.-Bad-Guys worldview. But I could tell where these suggestions really came from: our mail was full of them.

Anecdote Two: A young reader I spoke to at a comics shop in Santa Monica, California, told me he didn't think he would like *Frank Miller's Ronin* because he heard it was about samurais, and samurais were "wild stuff" (meaning that he thought the saga would be a period piece). His face brightened when I explained that *Ronin* was set in the future. When I asked him why that made a difference, he told me that if *Ronin* were set in the future, other DC characters could appear in it. Apparently, he wouldn't have bothered looking at the book without being able to believe that "crossovers" or "guest-stars" were at least a possibility.

Anecdote Three: I recently completed writing several issues of a humor title. At least, that's what *I* thought I was writing. The title character was a superhero, but the stories were intended as—for lack of a better term—kampoonery, and the tone of the writing was unmistakably comic. I started out on the project with the specific intention of creating an absurdist world for the character, never suspecting this would lead to problems. But it did; I was urged at one point to make the background of the strip "straighter" to accommodate the possibility of a crossover. The publisher had received several letters from readers who said they were confused. One

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA
THE ANNUAL TEAM-UP OF THE JUSTICE SOCIETY AND
GIANT
BIG
GET
SUPER-SIZE
TWICE AS MUCH FOR ONLY
TRIPLE
THRICE
TRIPLE
TRIPLE
TRIPL

course. Except that a perceived absence of that "larger context" seems to me to be a pretty picayune reason for rejecting a comic book. Or not even giving one a try.

But my theory would explain the cancellation of the DC mystery magazines, wouldn't it? Or the lack of interest in anthology magazines in general. They don't fit into an established "universe," or, at the very least, don't seem related to it.

And what I called "brand loyalty" a few paragraphs ago may be a function simply of a reader's not having the time, energy, or allowance-money to become fully acquainted with more than one company's "universe," and so be most "specialized."

There was a time when DC and Marvel had such distinctly different house styles that a preference for one over the other could be based solely on personal taste. But today, with Marvel's editor-in-chief having been trained primarily by Mort Weisinger, with the talent moving back and forth between the two companies, and with an industry-wide homogeneity of style, it's harder to make such fine distinctions. Or, as Al Milgrom is alleged to have said not too long ago, "DC is Marvel and Marvel is DC." I really think the complexities of each publisher's "reality" have a great deal to do with reader loyalty.

If you're not intimately acquainted with the current state of comic-book art, you probably find it difficult to understand how familiarizing yourself with the "universes" of either major publisher could be so time-consuming. You should know, then, that Marvel is currently publishing a multi-part *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, and DC has one of its own in the works. Each of these guides promises to run to over 250 pages! And with the way most comics are written today, you practically need to have memorized each character's genealogy in order to understand what's going on in any story. No wonder the poor reader "chooses sides!"

By now it should be clear how this *Dungeons and Dragons Syndrome* could also explain why my humor comic "confused" a few readers. Or why we haven't yet seen a major popular success from one of the "alternative" publishers. None of these publishers can offer another world in which the reader can lose himself.

As I said, there's nothing wrong with that kind of desire for escape. But I worry about its implications for the future of the medium. What does it mean if the degree to which a comic book fits into a larger universe is the only basis on which a comic book can be appreciated by sufficient numbers of readers to keep it in print? What we may be talking about here is, in essence, a narrowness of taste—the result of the comic book industry's having given the reader nothing else to acquire a taste for. Or, to put it another way, a kind of comic book equivalent of Gresham's Law: we're reaping what we've sown with 20-odd years of Marvel's crossovers and DC's multiple Earths and little else.

It just may be that comics have become too inbred, too self-referential. Perhaps the best-selling titles have circulations in the 200,000 range, rather than the million-copy sales they once enjoyed, because they have become cult items; they are inaccessible to the casual reader. And, if I take a long enough view, that worries me. Because everybody who wants to read comics has to *start* somewhere, and when he starts out, he knows no more about the minutiae of the characters' lore than the casual reader does.

My more immediate concern has to do with that renaissance of originality that I was hoping for. If the publishers have reason to believe that the only comic books they can sell are those that expand on their own fictional realities, then that will be the only kind of comic book they will publish.

And what would such a trend mean to the "alternative" publishers? Where would it lead them? Probably to building their own "universes." But if Rome wasn't built in a day, an alternate reality will take quite a lot longer. And how many honestly written, reasonably imaginative concepts will have to be sacrificed because they simply don't fit into the "one-universe-per-publisher" theory of comics publishing?

Do E-Man and Jon Sable inhabit the same Earth? Doubtful. Could there logically be a Ms. Mystic-Silver Star crossover? Probably not. Could Scorpio Rose meet the DNAgents? Not bloody likely.

I've read hundreds of science fiction anthologies in which different writers presented completely different speculations about, say, Mars; I was never bothered by the fact that the stories were bound together in the same book. And so it never bothered me if a new DC or Marvel title seemed to exist within its own world—and the "laws" of that world contradicted those of a world depicted in another DC or Marvel title. It never occurred to me that someone at DC, for example, should find it necessary to "explain" how Kamandi and The Legion of Super-Heroes were both "possible." And I'm still baffled by the readers who seem to think it's important tha Spider-Man and Luke Skywalker meet (though that's impossible, for legal reasons). If my *Dungeons and Dragons* Syndrome theory has even the slightest validity, I still don't understand why the syndrome should exist.

And I hope to god no one ever has to explain it to me. Because, as a writer who wants the freedom to create with fidelity to his own vision, unencumbered by the excess baggage of someone else's mythos, I hope to god I'm wrong about all this. ■

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The Golden Years

DOC SAVAGE

The Man of Bronze Still Shines

By WILL MURRAY

On February 17, 1933, a dramatic new adventure hero appeared on Depression newsstands in the pages of a pulp magazine named after him. He was *Doc Savage*, and he was a quantum leap beyond the pulp adventurers of his time. His editors dubbed him a "superhero," and he became America's first superhero, as we now understand the term. For 16 years—182 novels—Doc and his five trouble-busting companions "righted wrongs and punished evildoers" all over the world, thus inspiring and influencing a later generation of characters, including Superman, Batman, and the Man from U.N.C.L.E., to name only a few. While other popular figures like Dick Tracy, the Lone Ranger and Mickey Mouse recently celebrated their half-century marks amid media blitzes, this watershed character's 50th anniversary will probably not receive much publicity.

It's ironic, because Doc has had more impact on our popular culture than any of his better-known colleagues.

After the surprise success of Street & Smith's first character pulp, *The Shadow*, in 1931, business manager Henry W. Ralston decided to publish a "science-adventure" companion magazine. In its dime novel days, Street & Smith gave the world such enduring heroes as Nick Carter, Frank Merriwell and Buffalo Bill, and Ralston took this opportunity to return to the hero-publishing business very seriously. He and *Shadow* editor John L. Nanovic spent a year developing the character, whom Ralston based on a turn-of-the-century soldier of fortune and Street & Smith writer named Colonel Richard Henry Savage. Ralston called him Clark (after Clark Gable) Savage, Jr. He was nicknamed "Doc" because of his scientific and surgical abilities. As a boy, Doc's father put him in the hands of scientists

ARTWORK © 1975 MARVEL COMICS LTD.

Artist Brian Hamilton painted his own version of Doc in 1975.

Noted pulp historian Will Murray has written the Durande History of the Shadow and is the agent for Lester Dent's estate.

The pulp covers seen here and on the following pages are all by Walter M. Baumhofer, one of Doc's earliest cover artists.

who raised him to be the supreme adventurer, a man dedicated to helping the oppressed of the world. As a result, Doc grew into a six-foot, bronze-skinned genius with flake-gold eyes—just as a generation before, Nick Carter's father had brought him up to become the world's greatest detective. Ralston had been a Nick Carter fan as a boy.

Ralston and Nanovic then hired 28-year-old Lester Dent and handed him Nanovic's 30-page story, "Doc Savage, Supreme Adventurer," to use as an outline for the first Doc Savage novel, *The Man of Bronze*. Dent was a telegrapher who gravitated to pulp writing with the Depression. Thanks to a vivid imagination and enthusiastic writing style, he enjoyed a meteoric writing career before taking on the new assignment. He credited his powers to having grown up on a lonely Wyoming ranch. "I had no playmates," Dent once explained. "I lived a completely distorted youth. My only playmate was my imagination, and that period of intense imaginative creation which kids generally get over at the age of five or six, I carried till I was 12 or 13."

THE FIRST NOVEL

In the process of writing the first novel, Dent transformed Ralston's adventurer into something greater. As Dent described Doc, he was "a man with the astute deductive ability of Sherlock Holmes, the strength and agility of Tarzan of the Apes, the scientific mind of Einstein, and the goodness and humanity of Jesus Christ. All that and a little more: he looks human, acts human, but he's just slightly more." Doc never expressed emotion, except through his eerie trilling sound, and when he wanted to knock an opponent out, he pressed certain neck nerves. Fans of *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock will recognize some of these elements. Dubbed by Dent "The Man of Bronze," the character's sales soon rivaled those of *The Shadow*, and Dent found himself scripting a *Doc Savage* radio show.

If America hadn't been in a depression, Doc Savage might not have captured the public imagination as he did. Unlike The Shadow, who prowled dark alleys and dispensed .45-caliber justice, Doc was a public figure. Headquartered in New York's tallest skyscraper, he stopped wars, discovered lost civilizations, healed the sick, reformed the criminal, and employed the unemployed. In one novel, he resurrected a 1000-year-old mummy; in another, he prevented a new Ice Age. He was always saving the world. Wealthier than Midas, darkly handsome, beautiful women fell for him. The American public, disheartened by what it perceived as the failure of Democracy, did, too.

By contrast, Doc's aides—the greatest experts in the world as envisioned by Ralston—were rough-and-tumble eccentrics. Chemist Monk Mayfair was a human gorilla who feuded with lawyer Ham Brooks; engineer Renny Renwick was a giant; electrician Long Tom Roberts was temperamental; and archeologist Johnny Littlejohn was addicted to words like "superamalgamous." They met Doc during World War I. Because Doc knew more about their specialties than they did, Dent played up their quirks rather than their skills. Readers admired Doc, but they loved his assistants.

Doc Savage was an unlikely collision of concepts, but Dent brought it off with style. Forced to write under the "Kenneth Robeson" house name, he synthesized a style that combined high adventure, science fiction, hardboiled toughness and his own tongue-in-cheek humor. Compared to the too-serious pulp heroes of the time, Doc was, and remains, unique. Fifty years later, Dent's titles still excite the imagination: *The Thousand-Headed Man, Meteor Menace, The Spook Legion, The Whisker of Hercules, Death in Silver, Red Snow*, et al.

PUZZLING SUCCESS

Doc's success puzzled Dent at first. "I didn't realize how many people wanted to be superman," he declared. "It's more clear to me now. A man comes in from driving a cab all day to find his wife threatening to throw him out on his ear for not bringing home more tips to turn over to her. Naturally, he wants to be superman. Or a barber who has to vegetate in his shop all day, don't you reckon he yearns for a chance to get out and reorder the life of whole continents? Doc is sort of the what-I-

would-like-to-be dream of everybody, including me."

An athletic six-footer, Dent could have been the model for Doc himself. Once *Doc Savage*'s circulation hit over 200,000 copies a month, he hired a battery of ghost writers, including Ryerson Johnson, Laurence Donovan, William G. Bogart and *Newsday* editors Harold A. Davis and Alan Hathway, and sought his own adventures. He prospected for gold in Death Valley, hunted pirate treasure in his schooner, the *Albatross*, toured Europe as World War II broke out, sifted through Mayan ruins and flew his own plane. In 1940, he built his "house of gadgets" in his birthplace, La Plata, Missouri and settled down with his wife, Norma. That was the year Street & Smith entered the new comic book field with their *Shadow* and *Doc Savage Comics*. After first adapting Dent's novels, *Doc Savage Comics* struck out on its own in Jack Binder's "Doc Savage and the Angry Ghost" (August, 1941). In that story, Doc crash lands in Tibet, and a Tibetan mystic nurses him back to health and confers upon him a blue hood with a ruby on the forehead. This so-called "sacred ruby" gave Doc super-strength and hypnotic powers. A 1943 Doc radio program was based upon this version of the character.

That Street & Smith felt impelled to beef up Doc for comics is ironic, because Doc was the source for so many comic characters. The comics industry staple—a larger-than-life hero fighting superhuman villains—grew out of Doc's adventures. During the '30s, the Man of Bronze struggled against a procession of would-be world conquerors, berserk scientists and costumed criminals. Today, we call them super-villains, and some of them, like the Vanisher and the Metal Master, later showed up in Marvel Comics, their powers and goals intact. Others, like the Jaca in Gray, Captain Flamingo, the Midas Man and the Leader, are virtually super-villain archetypes. Doc had his own Lex Luthor in the form of the evil genius John Sunlight, who tried to take over the world with weapons stolen from Doc's Fortress of Solitude.

The Doc Savage influence is especially strong in the two seminal comic heroes. Superman and Batman. Elsewhere, Superman writer Jerry Siegel and Batman writer Bill Finger have acknowledged their debt to Lester Dent. While Batman owes more to the Shadow than to Doc, Bruce Wayne's physical training and scientific background are out of *Doc Savage*. His utility belt is patterned after the one Doc wore in 1938, and the Batmobile, like the Green Hornet's Black Beauty, is a descendant of Doc's bulletproof, gadget-armed grey sedan. Finger's Batman versus Hugo Strange story in *Batman #1* is a virtual rewrite of Dent's *The Monsters*. And is it a coincidence that Two-Face, who resembled a 1940 Doc villain, was initially named Harvey Dent?

Two views of Doc Savage in different kinds of danger. The pulp exploits were always filled with the fantastic but were delivered by Dent in such a captivating style that you practically flew through the dime novels. His popularity spread from pulps to radio and comics until, finally, a full-length feature, below right, starring Ron Ely. Ely also played Tarzan, another pulp hero, on TV in the 1960s.

Whatever the danger, Doc Savage was always ready, trilling all the way.

DOC SAVAGE SUPERMAN

Doc's influence on Superman is pervasive. The early Superman echoes Philip Wylie's *Gladiator* and Doc Savage equally. A 1933 sketch practically quotes Lester Dent when it refers to the uncostumed character as "A Genius in Intellect, A Hercules in Strength, A Nemesis to Wrongdoers." Even after the costume was added, a facial resemblance remained. Superman was cockier, but like Doc, he neither lied nor killed.. The source of his "Man of Steel" *nom de guerre* is obvious, but few know that its alternate, "Man of Tomorrow," was first applied to Doc Savage in 1938. Some have suggested that the Clark Kent name was cobbled from Clark Savage and Kent Allard (the Shadow's true identity), but the "official" version cites actors Clark Gable and Kent Douglas.

After Superman's creators left the feature, the Doc influence was renewed by editor Mort Weisinger. Weisinger, who with Jack Schiff sold a Doc plot to Dent, knew Doc's creator very well. During the '30s, he often sailed on Dent's *Albatross*, and once set it afire in a galley accident. When Weisinger realized Superman needed some fresh blood in the '50s, he ransacked *Doc Savage*. First, he appropriated Doc's Fortress of Solitude, which was a blue dome hidden at the North Pole. The Fortress was part of the rich background Dent built up over the years, which included the lost Mayan city whose grateful inhabitants supplied the gold which kept Doc in business, the Crime College, which cured crooks Doc captured, and a plot goldmine of other trappings. Periodically, some criminal would strike at the Mayan gold or the Crime College. Weisinger saw the plotting value of such spring-boards, and came up with the bottle city of Kandor, the Phantom Zone and a teenage cousin for the Man of Steel, Supergirl, whose model was Doc's cousin, Patricia Savage. Weisinger also dabbled with an abundance of romantic entanglements which Superman futilely pursued. Like Doc, Superman never married because of the fear that enemies would strike at his wife.

Lester Dent was aware of his impact on comics and expressed strong negative feelings. Interviewed in 1945, he said, "After the flood of super people and phantoms and bat men and such people that Doc started coming out of the cartoonists' and writers' inkwells, my stomach kind of turned. I've toned Doc down now to where he is not the slambang fire-eater he was. He still discovers strange tribes of people in the heart of some of the world's deserts, but he doesn't come across nations in the interior of the earth anymore."

Dent's response to what he felt was the sensationalizing of his ideas was to demythologize the Man of Bronze. He abandoned super-villains and the wilder science-fiction plots. Pearl Harbor wrought further changes. Street & Smith was as concerned over Doc's wartime status as DC was over Superman's. Everyone knew either hero could wipe out the Axis in a day. While Clark Kent conveniently flunked his draft physical, Doc Savage tried unsuccessfully to enlist. Washington informed him that his scientific efforts on the home front were more important than any frontline fighting he might do. Doc was rankled, and finally both the U.S. and Street & Smith caved in to the inevitable. In 1944, Doc was let loose upon the Axis. He infiltrated a Czech concentration camp to rescue an important scientist, parachuted into Japan to expose a traitor, saved Winston Churchill from the Nazis, and in one wild 1945 story, captured Adolph Hitler and turned him over to the Allies!

After the war, a more human Doc Savage devoted himself to a mix of adventure and mystery exploits as sales dwindled and *Doc Savage Magazine* was demoted to a bi-monthly. With the Nazis vanquished, Doc turned to fighting the Russians. One Cold War novel, *The Red Spider*, was shelved during a last-ditch effort to return Doc to his early days of glory. Bantam Books published it in 1979.

Doc Savage ended its long run with the Summer, 1949 issue when Street & Smith decided to kill its entire pulp line. The last novel was *Up From Earth's Center*. It was closer to a horror fantasy than to pulp adventure. In it, Doc and Monk pursue a Nazi, Weil—who claims to have died in Revolutionary times—into Hell itself. Doc is attacked by sentient stones, living trees, and retreats to the surface. Mr. Weil escapes. The loose ends were left un-

tied—something Dent never did before. Doc had fought his last battle with evil. It was the perfect ending for the series, if an accidental one. No one knew this was to be the last novel.

Lester Dent lived only a decade longer than his character. He turned to dairy farming, aerial photography, and writing for paperback publishers and magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*. He died of a heart attack at the Grim Smith Hospital in Kirksville, Missouri on March 11, 1959—not while treasure hunting as popularly believed. Only a year before, he asked about his famous stories. Dent laughed out loud and said, "They would be so outdated today that they would undoubtedly be funny. Hell, when I wrote them, an airplane that would fly 200 miles an hour was science fiction. They would be of no interest anymore."

LIFE AFTER DENT

Yet only six years later, Bantam Books began reprinting *Doc Savage*, triggering a new wave of interest in the Man of Bronze. Since 1964, over 110 Doc novels have been reissued with sales exceeding 15 million copies, thanks in part to ultra-realistic cover art by James Bama and Bob Larkin. Doc has made a comeback in other forms, too. A 1966 Goodson-Todman film of *The Thousand-Headed Man* was scratched by legal problems, but a Gold Key comics tie-in by Jack Sparling did appear. When George Pal acquired rights to the character in 1974, hopes were high for a spectular film series, but *Doc Savage—The Man of Bronze* turned out to be a campy fiasco. Marvel's *Doc Savage* comic tried adapting Dent's novels with uneven results in 1972. Their 1975 black-and-white version, written by Doug Moench and illustrated by John Buscema, caught the substance of Doc Savage while doing new stories, but lacked the humorous spirit of the characters. Moench never read more than one Doc novel.

Doc Savage is not usually thought of as a cult figure. But in recent years, he's been showing up in some odd places. Thinly-disguised versions of the Doc Savage cast have appeared in the novels of Ted White, Arthur Byron Cover, Jack Chalker, Roger Zelazny, and Philip Jose Farmer, who also penned a "biography," *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life*. Dent's ideas continue to be reflected in James Bond films and Marvel's *Fantastic Four*. Doc's recent appearance in Pacific Comics' Rocketeer is a welcome surprise. Twice, Bantam has tried to suspend the reprints. A flood of protest mail brought them back. Doc has a loyal following of fans who have calculated to the *month* how long it will take Bantam to reprint the entire series. They want to read them *all*. If that doesn't make Doc a cult character, who is? And with a new radio show and an animated television show in the future, Doc's next 50 years may be as successful as his first!

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Focus

Robert Loren Fleming

A writer who defied the odds and sold a new series first time out

DC Comics is actively promoting a forthcoming comic, premiering in August, called *Thriller*. It will be a non-returnable, Baxter comic in the Camelot 3000 format and boasts a daring new concept and features artwork by Trevor VonEeden, one of the new shining lights in the industry. But, people wonder, who is this Robert Loren Fleming, the writer, and what's so daring about the concept?

The concept came to Fleming shortly after he joined the DC staff as a proofreader in April 1982. "I felt like a fool," he explains at DC's offices. "Everyone was running around the halls excited about new ideas and as they passed me I got the impression they thought, 'Hmmph, proofreader.' I wanted to come up with something so good DC couldn't possibly turn it down."

Over a period of weeks, Fleming concentrated on the project at night. He was still getting used to Manhattan after moving downstate from the Buffalo area with his wife Shari. Not too long before, Robert felt his life going nowhere, so he convinced his wife to sell the car, come down to New York City and find work. They settled in Westchester and both went to work, although Robert was doing the same sort of menial stock work that bored him before. He quit two jobs in rapid succession and took a messengers' job to get into Manhattan regularly. Once there, he practically haunted the DC offices.

On his first visit to DC, he met a receptionist and no luck but found a way in through Joe Kubert's kindly intervention. Once inside, he spoke with Dean-Production Manager Jack Adler about becoming a letterer. Adler directed him and his creative writing degree to Karen Berger who showed Fleming how plots and scripts were developed.

He met with Berger as frequently as possible, some 10-12 times, just on one seven-page *House of Mystery* story ("Strung Out," #316). "At one point she had to throw me out of her offices because she didn't have time for me," Fleming continues, "and I guess she took pity on me and told me there was the proofreader's job open. I took the test and did the best anyone has ever done on that test." From April through October, Fleming worked on staff and learned the business.

"I found a big cabtray and put it on my desk. Since most of the editors didn't allow smoking in their office, the freelancers gravitated into mine," he says proudly. "I got to meet everybody." Including VonEeden who, coincidentally, pencilled the *HoM* story and later got assigned to *Thriller*.

In early June, Fleming had refined his idea into a two-page presentation and told people about it. They warned him away from Managing Editor Dick Giordano and suggested he try more back-up stories for the anthology books. Regardless, he went to Giordano and delivered the presentation. "Not more than 15 minutes later, I saw him in the hall and he was pointing at me. I thought I had really done something *wrong*," Fleming explains with a laugh. Giordano closed the door to Fleming's office and said, "I'm probably going to have to find a new proofreader soon." Fleming felt his new career ebbing away during the long pause. "Because, if everything you hand in is the same quality, we're going to have to send you home to write full-time."

It appears that Giordano read the proposal immediately, and had already taken it to editor Len Wein and vice-president-Operations Paul Levitz. Both agreed that it was terrific. Giordano, concerned it might have been a fluke, told Fleming to flesh out the outline into a three-issue synopsis. Later on, with only one issue's worth of synopsis on hand, Giordano and Levitz took it to president Jenette Kahn, who read it on a plane trip. On her return, she handed it back to Giordano, saying only, "Of course."

Bolstered by her quick approval, the book swung into production. Berger worried about Fleming writing it but Giordano had faith in him. As he worked on the first issue script, it came time to find an artist. "I said in the proposal that we needed a stylized look, something like the *Master of Kung-Fu* look that started with Paul Gulacy, then Mike Zeck and Gene Day." It was Levitz who suggested VonEeden. When Fleming explained the concept to the young penciller, "He kept jumping up. He would leap up and pace around the office, puffing on cigarettes, saying 'I gotta talk to Dick!'," Fleming says. Giordano, who consented to be the book's editor, agreed to the choice.

"Trevor and I work in a unique fashion. I write a full-script but he treats it as a plot. This way he knows exactly what I'm driving at, what emotions I want from the characters and has the details. But, he can change things around, like make a three page sequence into four and then take the next three page sequence and make it two."

Visually, the look of the world 50 years from now is heavily stylized but not as bleakly oppressive as Frank Miller's future in Ronin. "That's where Frank Miller and I differ," Fleming explains. "I am relentlessly optimistic. In my future, America has a black president, no nuclear war and things like bullet trains. I want to show the world as I hope it to be. I also want to blow today's news out-of-proportion in a future setting so I can discuss things."

Thriller is the name of a mysterious woman. She is the mastermind behind a family of people with unique talents, used when called upon by nature and circumstance. It is much like the Shadow and his cadre of operatives, a favorite of Fleming's. In fact, the pulps and their flavor served as the inspiration for *Thriller*. There will be elements of Doc Savage, the Shadow and the Avenger seen throughout the series. "I went home to create something and one thing I loved, but has never been successful, was pulp adaptations. I came up with the title, *Thriller*, first and built it up from there."

"The family doesn't *look* for adventure. Something will occur to them; their motivation is the same as yours or mine or your grandmother's. It is physically a family although some of the characters are not related. I try and make it very realistic."

There are a variety of subtle homages thrown into the series. One family member is Robert Furillo, named after *Hill Street Blues*' Frank Furillo but based on actor Robert DeNiro with the abilities of the old pulp hero, the Avenger. After an accident while freebasing cocaine, Furillo's skin is 98 percent burned but the doctors try a synthetic skin (which exists today, Fleming adds) which works—only for 24 hours, then a new "coat" has to be put on. He can mold the synthetic material, since it has so

PHOTO JOHN CLAYTON

little real skin to cling to, into any shape he desires. Coupled with his acting abilities, he's the perfect penetration agent.

In addition to giving Fleming's world a unique look, VonEeden has added elements to the story that please the author. For example, the religious zealot, Scabbard, was visualized by VonEeden as being even larger and more imposing than Fleming ever imagined. Fleming thought it would be interesting to have the scabbard actually be part of the hulk's skin and convinced VonEeden it would work out best. "In the sequence he drew, it looked like Jack Kirby himself did it. It's wonderful!"

VonEeden also added a page to the first issue that made Fleming sit and think. "I took this extra page home and cursed Trevor while trying to write it," Fleming says. "I came up with something that just about summarized the first issue and I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't put that page in. Trevor was stunned, having never conceived of it that way. That's how we work off of each other. It takes extra time to write the script and then rewrite it when the pencils are done, but I prefer it that way."

With six scripts completed, Fleming is anxiously awaiting the book's premiere. He keeps busy with an occasional letters column for other editors and has sold a police-oriented mini-series to Len Wein. For the moment, Robert Loren Fleming is sitting and waiting for public reaction to his first series—crossing his fingers and optimistically looking to the future.

—Robert Greenberger

A look at the world of Thriller, courtesy artist Trevor VonEeden.

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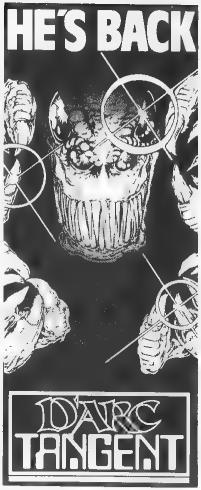

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Darlin' Dick Ayers: War for a Career

By FRANK LOVECE

It was clobberin' time for Stan Lee at a 1976 college lecture, a one-two punch, feint and jab.

"Hey, Stan," came the question from the floor, "do you remember Dick Ayers?"

Lee beamed. "Darlin' Dick?" he grinned, using an old credit-box endearment. "Sure, I remember Darlin' Dick! What about the Darlin' One?"

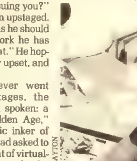
"How come Darlin' Dick is suing you?"

Lee went ashen. He had been upstaged. "Dick," he finally replied, "feels he should get reprint royalties for artwork he has already sold us. We can't do that." He hopped to another question, visibly upset, and that was that.

Although Ayers' case never went beyond the preliminary stages, the unspeakable had finally been spoken: a veteran of comic books' "Golden Age," and probably the most prolific inker of comic-art maestro Jack Kirby, had asked to be granted the same right as that of virtually every other creative professional—the right to receive royalty payments. Yet only now, years after Ayers' case and almost 45 years since comic books' inception, are the medium's writers and artists starting to get them, both from the established companies and from the wealth of "alternative" presses springing up like TV antennas after WW II.

Like Lenny Bruce's pioneering efforts to open up the language of comedy, or Norman Mailer's similar efforts for mainstream literature, Ayers' suit was a crucial first step, that of a veteran-grown-radical out of necessity. "I guess I was the first to go public on the royalties issue," he reflects today, "but only because it was necessary, not sour grapes because the reprints were crowding me out."

Ayers' own early work had become his competition in the early '70s, when Sgt. Fury, his hallmark book at Marvel Comics, went from monthly to bi-monthly, with full-length reprints every other issue, killing continuity. About the same time, Marvel's Western books, the genre with which Ayers is still most identified, went completely reprint. The man who, with Jack Kirby, had given Marvel much of the look associated with its early, attention-getting days, was being shoved aside—and, since he was a freelancer despite his commitment to one company, shoved aside *without* a pension or even the legal qualifications to apply for unemployment. "It was a shame because the industry owes Dick Ayers a lot," says Kirby today. "At a very bad time for Marvel, in the beginning, it was guys like Ayers, [letterer] Artie Simek and [colorist] Stan Goldberg who kept it going. In [the early] days, Marvel was hanging by its teeth."



Dick Ayers, happy to be at work.

Outwardly, Ayers is indeed much closer to being "Darlin' Dick" than "Snarlin' Dick." He's the kind of white-haired, good-natured neighbor indigenous to the White Plains, New York neighborhood where he lives with his wife and one of four children. Still, his effort to receive recompense from Marvel was not the first time Ayers contemplated such action in his journey from young cartoonist to established penciller/inker. In the early '50s, he discovered that Magazine Enterprises' *Jimmy Durante* book, which he drew, was being reprinted in England—sans royalties.

"I became upset that they were reprinting my work with my name on it overseas without telling me, and figured Durante wouldn't like that much, either. I mention ed it to my lawyer, who got two of [Superman co-creator] Joe Shuster's lawyers interested, but the final decision was that there would be a long battle and heaven knows, we could've come out with nothing."

This was still early in a career which began after Ayers returned from WW II service in the Army Air Corps. After garnering an art degree but having no luck finding jobs, he decided in 1947 to enter the first class of Burne Hogarth's newly formed School of Visual Arts. "Hogarth was a great teacher. He stressed storytelling, which many people starting out tend to overlook—they just want to draw." While still taking night classes at Hogarth's school, Ayers began freelancing for Joe Shuster, who was packaging whole comic books and selling them to publishers, a common practice of the day. After working on an aborted teenage strip called *Chick 'n' Chu*, he was assigned to pencil Shuster's *Funnyman* book.

Soon, the publisher of *Funnyman*, Magazine Enterprises, gave him *Jimmy Durante* and his first Western, a Doc Holliday story. Ayers quit Hogarth's school and plugged into comic art full time.

"For a long time in the beginning, I was headed in the direction of being a syndicated cartoonist, but I began to discover that I actually liked doing comic books better. I wasn't stuck with just one character. One week, I might do a mystery story, the next week, a war story." Or a Western. In 1949, after three issues of *Jimmy Durante*, Ayers was put on the "Calico Kid" feature in the *Tim Holt Range Book*. What followed was a stroke of marketing ingenuity worthy of Sammy Glick. Westerns and horror books were selling, figured some unknown executive, so why not combine the two genres? So the Calico Kid became the Ghost Rider, a frontier marshal with supernatural powers, and one of the most popular and imitated characters Ayers would draw in his Western career.

The Ghost Rider was a success from the beginning of its long, though spotty, run. "Publisher Martin Goodman would wait to see how each issue would sell before giving me the go-head for the next—a 45 percent return rate from newsstands was the cutoff point. The first *Ghost Rider* sold 67 percent and the accountant was all happy and smiling shaking my hand." But two years later came the call that every freelancer half-dreaded and half-expected with the air of a policeman's wife—*Ghost Rider* would be put into limbo until comic book sales started picking up. Ayers, by now married and expecting his first child, immediately hit the streets of New York City looking for work.

By noontime one particular day, after making a few stops at different publishers, he found himself at the office of Marvel's first incarnation, Timely Comics. "I

Frank Lovece, New York-based freelance writer, has written for Video Review, Village Voice, Oui *and other publications.*

ART © 1983 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Two samples of Ayers' art during the late 1960s, when he and John Severin were producing some of Marvel's best artwork.

wondered, who's gonna be around at lunch time? But something made me go in. The secretary took my presentation to the editor, then called me in and it was like he was waiting for me—my *Ghost Rider* was there on a rack." The editor—Stan Lee—gave Ayers his first assignment for Timely/Atlas/Marvel, the beginning of a 24-year working relationship. "I called my wife," says Ayers, "to tell her of this lucky urge to barge in at lunch time; she told me that at noon, on her own lunch hour, she had lit a candle at church, and prayed."

After Timely became Atlas, Ayers penciled, inked and lettered the exploits of the Human Torch and the Rawhide Kid, and also wrote and drew several short horror and mystery stories. The early '50s furor over comic books' alleged effect on children was reaching a climax. "The Comics Code people killed the Ghost Rider. They didn't like the word 'ghost.' Later, we got a call telling us we couldn't do the Human Torch anymore," presumably for the same reason that the character was cut from the recent *Fantastic Four* cartoon series—kids, goes the argument, might imitate the Torch and immolate themselves for fun.

In 1958, Ayers began his long and best-known artistic association, collaborating with Jack Kirby during the beginnings of Marvel. Lee had assigned Ayers to ink the cover of one of the "pre-superhero Marvel" monster books, the print equivalent of the then current science-fiction and monster-movie rage. (Although often overlooked in the Marvel canon, the books showcased the well-honed talents of a generation of artists including Kirby, Ayers, Steve Ditko and Don Heck, who were clearly all dressed up with no place to go.) Ayers would soon ink dozens of Kirby comic-book pages a month, one month even 100, as well as the daily *Sky Masters* newspaper strip which Kirby and Wally Wood had originated. Ayers teamed with Kirby and Lee for the short-lived Dr. Droom series, which ran in the 1960s version of *Amazing Adventures*. Droom was the nascent Marvel's first attempt at a continuing superheroic [albeit mystery-oriented] character. But Ayers, by his own account, did not ink the earliest *Fantastic Fours*.

REVISING HISTORY

There is a bit of revisionist history here, on the heels of Kirby's own controversial declaration (COMICS SCENE #2) that he, and not Lee, actually scripted many of the early stories bearing Lee's name. Despite what it says in a checklist printed in Marvel's self-produced fan magazine, *Foom*, Ayers, by his own record, did not start inking *FF* until the sixth issue (Joe Sinnott inked #5 and some of #6). Jack Kirby claims today that it was actually *Artie Simek* who inked the bulk of at least the first three issues, with Ayers, he says, also pitching in (though Ayers' record has no account of *FF* #1-3). This not only explains the noticeable stylistic differences between those first *FFs* and concurrent Kirby work, but bolsters Kirby's contention that when times were desperate, it was often the "lesser lights" who pitched in to keep Marvel (and their own jobs) afloat.

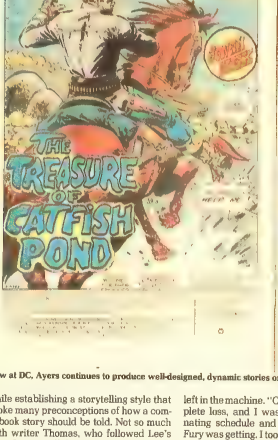
As one of those stalwarts, Ayers received $7 a page for his work. His usual routine would be to wake at five a.m., be at work by six and ink five to seven pages a day. "Until Stan explained something important to me," he remembers, "I would be utterly exhausted by the end of the day. But he told me, 'If I want somebody to just go over Jack's stuff with a brush, I could get anybody off the street who could trace. You draw. So lay it on with the shadows. If Jack has one figure in the picture, add to it, put a lot of stuff in there.' So, I did it his way and it was better than before. It released me, and the work got easier and easier." But even at such a rate, the early-'60s dollars he earned not only had to support a household but pay for medical and retirement insurance—comic book publishers offered no pension or even the most rudimentary medical plan.

"You're traditionally not protected," says Ayers. "Comic book publishers are only now starting to realize that a freelancer for them is not a like a spot-

illustration freelancer for other magazines. You're tied up with a title that must come out every month on a schedule, and therefore, you're not able to pursue outside work." The dynamics of blackballing, in comics as in any other highly competitive field, entered into that outlook—get behind on a book or take time off for other things, and you may be out for good.

Ayers, in any case, would eventually move on to Marvel's *Sgt. Fury*, taking over the pencilling from Kirby with issue #8. He would continue with that book with almost no interruptions for the next 90-odd issues, plotting stories he says, based on ideas from Lee, Roy Thomas and Gary Friedrich, of non-traditional layouts in the same manner as the Marvel superhero artists. John Severin as inker beginning with the issue #49 both added technical accuracy to the artwork and eliminated the cartoonish quality that Ayers, despite his years of doing fairly realistic work, has still never lost.

As time—and Friedrich—wore on, however, the star faded. "It had reached a point," observes Ayers, "where no one wanted anything more than to meet deadlines." A stream of *Fury* reprints began wreaking havoc with Marvel's highly touted continuity. By the time Gerry Conway took over in a last-ditch effort to save the book, there wasn't much energy left in the machine. "Conway was at a complete loss, and I was upset at the alternating schedule and over the treatment *Fury* was getting. I took over the inking and there was no way it would look good since I was furious. The story with the old German hooked up [cyborg-like] to a machine? Oh, god," he groans.



JONAH HEX TM & © 1985 DC COMICS INC

Now at DC, Ayers continues to produce well-designed, dynamic stories only now it's in the Old West.

BEGINNING OF THE END

The work dried up and Ayers—who has pencilled not only *Fury* but the *Captain Savage* and *Combat Kelly* war books as well as a revamped *Ghost Rider* he cared little for, plus other Westerns and occasional superhero books—suddenly found himself in the cold. He was forced to work as a night watchman, the four p.m.-to-midnight shift. "It would be weird, these days, going into a store and picking up a copy of my books only to see reprints. I thought I was out of comics for good." Despite the change, he approached the new work as a kid would a game of cops and robbers, enjoying it. But the fun ended the day he turned 50. "I was locking the big gate in front of the parking lot that day and asked myself, 'Shit, is this where I end up at 50?'" Soon afterward, Ayers collapsed at work and was rushed to a hospital intensive-care unit. While recuperating from an internal ailment, he decided to take one more shot at art, teaching adult-education classes at night. "That job gave me something I could never have before—unemployment compensation. I qualified for $25 a week and that gave me gas money to look for work."

About this time, he noticed a newspaper photo of artist and creators'-rights advocate Neal Adams along with Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who were then involved in a much-publicized royalties case of their own. Ayers telephoned Adams to wish him and former boss Shuster good luck. "Then, Neal, a

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Ayers has returned to superheroes with the Original Shield, coming soon from Red Circle.

wonderful person, asked me how I was, so I told him my story."

The subsequent conversation proved encouraging enough for Ayers to seek his own recompense from Marvel, an effort which, unlike Siegel and Shuster's main thrust for a piece of the *Superman* marketing pie, was more concerned with reprint rights. Although eventually landing more of a moral than financial victory, Ayers managed to retufn from obscurity and demonstrate that the big companies could be challenged. With Adams' help, he found work at DC Comics and today can point to *G.I. Combat* and *Jonah Hex* among his credits. He has done little superhero work in the last five years, the closest being *Kamandi* for a short stint, but that is about to change. In addition to working on *Hex*, which Ayers gets a kick out of, he has begun pencilling for Red Circle comics' *The Comet* title. There, he will chronicle the adventures of the Original Shield and will be inked by some-time *Hex* inker Tony DeZuniga. This brings Ayers almost full circle: he's drawing for the different genres all over again.

At 58, Ayers has found himself back in comics and with little bitterness toward the company that cut him off. "Marvel was fun to be with; I didn't stay there 24 years for nothing. But maybe they understand my position better now." Indeed they have; Marvel instituted reprint page rates after their battle with Ayers and, recently, DC increased their reprint rates from $2 per page to $20. His battles have been won, at last.

A UNIQUE VIEW

In those 24 years at Marvel, Ayers has certainly seen the company from a rare, perhaps unique, vantage point. Who else would admit out loud that, "Back in the early days of Marvel, they wrote their own letters for the letters page"? Or to having as little control as "Jolly" Jack Kirby over the cloying endearments Stan "The Man" Lee would use in a credit box—now being fueled by Kirby's claims that he scripted, not just helped plot, most of the stories he drew for Marvel—Ayers remembers it being mostly Lee.

"Stan was terrific by phone. He would call up and give each of us the germ of a plot and we would take it from there. Before he started working that way—the 'Marvel Method'—he would send me Western scripts that were just dialogue. The first caption would set the scene, tell me the story opened on a stagecoach or something, and I would go with what the dialogue indicated. Later, he would call us each into the city now and then to hype us up. He was fantastic at that. If he was telling you what Dr. Doom was to look like, he became Dr. Doom right in front of you."

There were other, lesser-known writers scripting for editor Lee during Ayers' years. "Hank Chapman was one of the different writers who worked on [the Atlas] books. Ed Jurist was another one; he went to Hollywood later. And another one who went to the West Coast was Don Rico [whose name later cropped up during the beginnings of Marvel's heyday, on a Dr. Strange story or two]." In the days before Marvel's trademark credit boxes, those and other writers, remembers Ayers, worked obscurely in a field few took seriously, like that of writing baseball card blurbs. It was no better for many artists. Ayers in the '50s would be told by neighborhood mothers that he was corrupting their children and should find more "proper" work.

Nothing, however, may have been more proper than combining the larger-than-life pencils of Kirby with the cartoonish, almost whimsical inking of Ayers. The team-up was destined to be the stuff of modern fables. "Right after art school," recounts Ayers, "before I even knew comic books existed, I went up to *Popular Science* looking for work. The editor saw my stuff and says, 'Y' know, you ought to look up these two fellas, Joe[Simon and Kirby. You draw a lot like them.' I didn't even know who they were."

Today, ensconced within a quiet suburban home and surrounded by Abraham Lincoln memorabilia, WW I and II reminance books and several volumes containing reprints of his first fascination, the comic strips, Ayers seems content. But there's always some push or other. "I've reached a point now where I wouldn't mind doing a newspaper strip—because I think of that in terms of not having to live in the New York area. New York's getting a little expensive and my two sons in Florida are doing a helluva lot better than we're doing here." Ayers had to cash in his first insurance policy years ago to help pay off his house, but has since invested in another such policy and an IRA account. He's comfortable, but after having pencilled or inked more than 18,000 comic book pages in his career, it seems as if someone or something should have provided for a comics veterans' retirement.

Until that retirement comes for Dick Ayers, however, there's time enough for pet projects, alternative-press work and, perhaps, to see his long-awaited vision of royalties for reprints come true. ■

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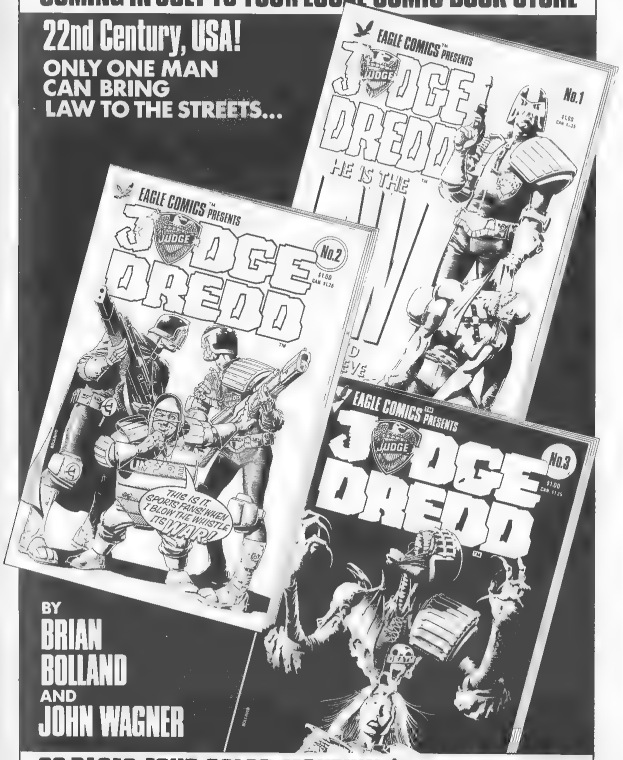

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LOVE'S ILLUSIONS I RECALL

A survey of the rise and fall of the Romance Comics

By ALAN BREZNICK

THE MOMENT I SAW YOU, IT STARTED ALL OVER AGAIN FOR ME. NOTHING— NO ONE SEEMED TO MATTER ANYMORE ...BUT YOU!
FOR THE FIRST TIME, I'M SEEING YOU AS YOU REALLY ARE.
DARLING, IT'S NOT OUR FAULT— WE DIDN'T MEAN TO FALL IN LOVE.
YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MUCH I REALLY LOVE YOU!
WHAT IS THIS FEELING INSIDE ME? IS IT LOVE?
FACE UP TO THE TRUTH, RICK— FACE UP TO YOURSELF!
YOU'RE DIFFERENT FROM ANY WOMAN I'VE EVER KNOWN!
HOW LONG CAN THIS GO ON, MY LOVE?
PEGGY, I'VE BEEN SO BLIND ALL ALONG, IT'S YOU I LOVED!
OH, I'VE BEEN SUCH A LITTLE FOOL!
WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE, PEGGY, IT'S OVER!
RICHARD, YOU'RE LIVING A LIE!
LOVERS

THE CREATORS OF "CONTEMPORARY ROMANCES" START THE DAY

Back in the days when romance comics were queen, you couldn't hit a newsstand or candy store without running into comic books filled with beautiful, fashionably dressed young women staring dreamily off into space after their loves. Reduced to the shivers and shakes by the mere sight of the men they adored, our lovely but love-struck heroines would spend the entire story struggling valiantly to capture their heart's affection, risking life, limb and even their precious virginity. And, like the fabled Canadian Mounties, they would almost always get their man in the end.

Today, all of the melodramatic love books of the 1940s, '50s and '60s are resting in comics heaven, along with Ma and Pa Kent and Spider-Man's gentle Uncle Ben. (A few romance newsposer strips, like *Brenda Starr* and *Mary Worth*, are still hanging around). But, more than 20 years after their heyday has passed, the memories of them and of the simpler era they evoke, still live fondly in the minds of many. Although the four-color soap operas faded away faster in the last decade than the paper they were printed on, both fans and critics believe they are worthy of a second look.

And with good reason. At their peak, the top love comics, *Young Love* and *Young Romance*, each sold at least one million copies every month. Such numbers are fantasies today for many executives in the troubled comics industry.

"Isn't that incredible?" asked Joe Simon, chuckling in amazement. "We had a helluva audience. If we sold one million copies, we probably had 10 million readers." Simon teamed up with Jack Kirby in 1949 to create *Young Romance* and *Young Love* and in the process, launched one of the industry's most successful genres.

The fall from grace for the illustrated soap operas was almost as dramatic. Starting with the late 1950s, love comics began to wane in popularity as both the nation and the comics industry changed. The decline eventually became so great that by the mid-70s, romance comics had become just another chapter in America's comics heritage.

"It's one of the great mysteries of this business," said Dick Giordano, v.p.-executive editor at DC Comics, who drew some of the love comics in the late '60s. "If anyone knows how to get back to it [the love comics] and do it well, let me know."

So what happened to a line of comics that enchanted and intrigued an entire generation of American women, as well as more than a few American men? Why did they reach such soaring heights after World War II only to crash on the rocks less than three decades later? What effects did they have on their readers? And will they ever reappear on the newsstands?

For the answers to these questions, stay tuned. But first, a little history.

THE CYCLE BEGINS

Although they were probably the biggest overnight success in comic book history, the love comics owe much to the pulp journals and "women's films" that preceded them in the first half of this century. Since the '20s, publishers had been enjoying great popularity with confessional tearjerkers like *True Story* and *True Confessions* that bragged about telling "the whole story." Simon said that these melodramatic tales, "told in the first person by love-smitten teens" who were "youthful, emotional, yet wholesome," set the stage for *Young Love* and *Young Romance*.

"It was just a matter of putting *True Confessions* into illustrative form," he said "Visually, it seemed a natural conversion for comic books. And, indeed, it was easy."

The so-called women's films cranked out by Hollywood during the '20s, '30s and '40s (especially during World War II, when American movie goers were predominantly female) also developed the taste for mass melodrama among American girls and women. Usually setting their stories in big cities, with their heroines anxiously chasing Mr. Right despite all sorts of perils and obstacles, such movies helped establish the themes that would be so successfully exploited by romance comics.

When the United States entered the prosperous postwar years in 1946, the time was ripe for romance comics to bloom like summer love. Forced by the demands of war to leave their homes for work in the factories and offices, many American women now had more money and independence than ever before. Yet, as their husbands, fathers and sons returned from overseas, they were told that it was now time to find a man, start a home and return to "normal" life.

Many women did so gladly. Even those who should have known better believed, or fervently hoped, that the nation could simply pick up where it had left off before the war. Marriage, home and family were virtues to be practiced at the exclusion of all else.

Enter the love comics, preaching their idealized version of romance—pretty girl meets handsome boy, girl gets boy, girl loses boy, girl wins boy back. Simon said he and Kirby started *Young Romance* after noticing that newsstands and beauty shops offered little reading material to "women factory workers, housemaids, housewives, teen girls" and other females "We thought we were being very scientific," he said.

The first love comic book was actually "an outgrowth of the *Archie* teen comedies with romantic scenes," said Richard Howell, a Simon and Kirby buff who has researched the early days of romance comics. He explained that Hillman Comics' *My Date*, a four issue series, mostly done by the Simon/Kirby Team, featured a group of teens who engaged in both romantic antics and Archie-type sight gags. The romantic theme showed such promise that Kirby and Simon then launched *Young Romance*.

That historic first issue, which hit the stands in late 1947, sold out almost immediately across the country. Simon remembers he and Kirby, consumed by doubts, checking on a newsstand just after the issue came out. "We saw a bunch of girls with *Young Romance*, giggling and eating it up," he recalls. The two knew they had a hit on their hands.

Alan Brennick, a true romantic, has covered the world of comic strips for COMICS SCENE.

Simon and Kirby would churn out *Young Romance*, *Young Love* and other formula tearjerkers for about a decade and their creations would inspire hundreds of imitators, most of them inferior in quality (although others, such as the *Secret Hearts* and *Dangerous Corner* series, shined). "We were on top with those books for a good 10 years," Simon said.

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

What made them so successful?

Their outstanding art, for one thing. Outlandish and descriptive, making use of bold heavy shadings and exaggerated expressions and actions, the best drawn love comics featured styles usually found only in the adventure serials of the day. "Ah, those were the days," Simon said, chuckling again as he looked back on some of the corny old covers. "The artwork was so wrong, yet so successful. It was pretty bold art for romance."

Much later, he added, romance artists would turn away from realism and draw the comics "like children's greeting cards —flowery and delicate and fashion-conscious." While the art may have looked nicer, he explained, "they lost a lot of impact doing that...We were more interested in the story and they were more interested in the drawing."

In those early glory days, the good romance comics also had the advantage of employing some of the finest artists in the business. Besides the Simon and Kirby team, who drew many of the *Young Love* and *Young Romance* covers and stories themselves, such talented professionals as Mort Meskin, John Prentice, Bill Draut, Bruno Premiani, Leonard Starr, Gene Colan and John Romita, Sr. worked on the books. During the '60s and '70s many other professionals contributed their talents, including John Buscema, Dan Heck, John Rosenberger and Jay Scott Pike. "Even when the stories were stupid, the art was terrific," said Carol Kalish, manager of director sales for Marvel Comics and also a love comics buff. "We used the best writers and artists until sales started to diminish," DC's Giordano added.

MEDIOCRE STORIES
Love
OH, ME-OH, MY! HOW CAN I TELL MY DEAREST CARL THAT IM, IN REALITY, ONLY 5 FOOT 9?!
OH, ME-OH, MY! HOW CAN I TELL MY DEAREST JULIA THAT IM, IN REALITY, ONLY 5 FOOT 10?!
BRIAN PEARCE '83

Contrary to current popular belief, the stories themselves were also frequently topnotch. Although limited by the straight soap opera formulae, skilled scriptwriters often turned melodramatic mishmash into comic masterpieces. The quality love comics, like any good literature, provided readers with new perceptions and insight into the ways of the world.

"We're not just talking about bland stories with simplistic, downgrading stereotypes," Kalish said, refusing to dismiss love comics as trash. In the case of the best efforts, she added, "We're really talking about high-class soap opera and melodrama, at times with sophisticated perception." Heavy issues like bigotry and poverty were tackled and incorporated into the stories long before they became fashionable.

As an example, Kalish cited one of her favorite love epics, which revolves around a young American soldier stationed in West Germany after World War II. The soldier, despite a fiancee in New York, succumbs to the wiles of a "slavish and devoted" German girl. When the fiancee appears, he must choose between his German infatuation and his steady girl, who offers intelligence, independence and a strong sense of personal dignity.

"The soldier makes the intelligent decision and goes with his fiancee," Kalish said. "It's the type of thing you would never see in a '60s love comic" even though the romance books of that era experimented with social and political themes.

"We didn't try knowingly for social conscience," Simon said. "We were just trying to milk the most emotions we could out of any situation, the ecstasy and agony of a G-rated film." Couples only kissed, he added, they never slept together.

YOUNG WOMEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Yet romance critics charge that these agonies and ecstasies took their toll on the mostly young, highly impressionable girls and women that devoured the books every month. Maureen Turim, a cinema professor who's also a student of love comics, for instance, blames today's soaring divorce rate in part on the false romantic ideals offered to women by the male-dominated media. Along with films, radio and TV, she said, love comics and their creators must bear some of the responsibility.

Imagine, Turim said, the typical girl or woman in her late teens or early twenties who read several of the love book series religiously in the '50s. Month after month, she was subjected to stories of heroines her age or slightly older unexpectedly falling victim to the flush of first or second love. Suddenly overwhelmed by hot flashes, chills, dizziness, clumsiness and other uncontrollable physical and emotional reactions when merely sighting their

I WANTED TOO MUCH
I DO I DO--BUT I'VE AIN'T ENOUGH FOR ME--
AND SO I LET DAN WALK OUT OF MY LIFE! BUT I PROMISED MYSELF--
I'LL NEVER LET ANY THING LIKE THAT HAPPEN AGAIN

The material covered here used to captivate readers but is now deemed laughable.

"...IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE HERBERT WOULDN'T EVEN SPEND TWO MINUTES AWAY FROM THEM - HE WOULDN'T EVEN STAY IN THE SHOWER THAT LONG! IT WAS THEN THAT I BEGAN TO WORRY ABOUT HIM..."
SOAP
BRIAN PARE '83
"I MARRIED A STAMP COLLECTOR!"

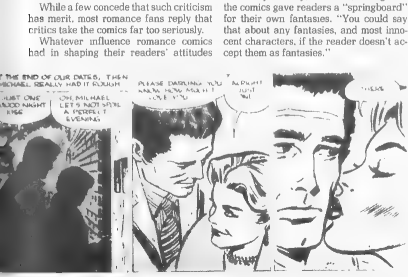
dreamboats from afar, these heroines became "almost clinical hysterics" by the story's end, the professor argued. They wind up sacrificing everything for the men they love, no matter how unworthy these men may be.

In the real world, Turim continued, love is much more complicated than bells ringing in the distance and women acting in a totally irrational way. But one would never pick that up from reading most romance comics.

While a few concede that such criticism has merit, most romance fans reply that critics take the comics far too seriously.

Whatever influence romance comics had in shaping their readers' attitudes toward men and love depended on the strength or weakness of many other, more important factors, said DC v.p.-editorial director Joe Orlando. He said the love books probably did not have as much influence as peers, family structure, school, church and other factors.

Others go further, dismissing Turim's criticism as "ridiculous." One is Nicola Cuti, a DC editor who once wrote love stories for Charlton comics. "I think it was extremely healthy," he said, noting that the comics gave readers a "springboard" for their own fantasies. "You could say that about any fantasies, and most innocent characters, if the reader doesn't accept them as fantasies."


THE END OF OUR DATES, THEN MICHAEL REALLY HAD IT ROUGH
JUST ONE MORE NIGHT
ONE MICHAEL LET'S MAKE IT A PERFECT EVENING
PLEASE DARLING, YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU
ALRIGHT
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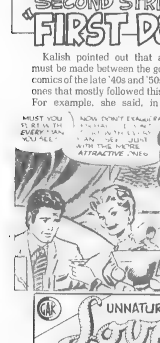
First in a new line of illustrated entertainment from
TEXAS COMICS INCORPORATED

JOE DROPKICKED MY HEART ONTO THE SIDELINES WHEN HE MET JANE. HE WAS THE END OF MY DREAMS. I WAS A...
SECOND STRING ROMANCE IN THE "FIRST-DOWN OF LOVE"
ART: CARMINE INFANTINO

Kalish pointed out that a distinction must be made between the good romance comics of the late '40s and '50s and the bad ones that mostly followed this golden age. For example, she said, in one Young Romance story, a lower-class heroine is courted by a wealthy, although worthless, dilettante who criticizes everthing about her. She starts to conform to his wishes until she realizes that she's losing her self-respect and self-image. She then drops him, deciding that his love is not worth the tremendous sacrifice.


MUST YOU BE SO IN THE EVERYMAN YOU SEE?
NOW DON'T BE MAD, HAL. I'M JUST TRYING TO SHOW YOU THE MORE ATTRACTIVE SIDE
UNNATURAL
SORRY, BIFF, BUT I NEED SOMEONE WHO WILL LOVE ME FOR MY MIND
FOX

Kalish said the story's message is that love is based on respect, intelligence, moral integrity and interesting, compatible personalities, not just physical attraction. "I can't think of anything I would better want a young girl or boy to read," she said. "Those women who blame love comics for their divorces probably blame many other things too."

There was never "a groundswell of complaints," added Giordano. "I don't like to believe that people out there are not capable of making up their own minds about what's good for them. The average person doesn't have that problem."

But, starting with the mid-60s, the average person did stop buying and reading romance comics. Why?

Comics writers, fans and critics usually name several large factors—the decline in quality once Simon and Kirby left the field, the jump in comic book prices, the advent of TV soap operas, the sexual revolution and the development of the women's lib movement. In the '60s and '70s, young women worried about much more than meeting Mr. Right and living happily ever after.

"Maybe kids grew up faster than the comics did," Cuti said. Orlando agreed. "The mythical reader stopped believing in Santa Claus."

Although sales had been dipping ever since the end of the Simon and Kirby glory years in the late '50s, they plummeted drastically between the mid-60s and mid-70s. "They were really cotton-fluff fantasies," Kalish said. "In 1963, these sort of fantasies would've been fine. By 1973-74, they weren't enough."

When the comics did try to adapt to the times, it was a case of way too little, way too late. In the late '60s and early '70s, there was a variety of attempts to introduce social consiousness and realism into the love epics. Some of these attempts were executed by Joe Simon, who returned to DC in the early '70s to head *Young Love* and *Young Romance*. But these feeble efforts were futile, as stories became heavy-handed and preachy rather than entertaining. No one wanted to read tales dripping in moralistic overtones. The thrill was gone.

Even a last ditch attempt by DC to blend romance and ghost stories in a "gothic comic," called *Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love*, failed miserably in the early 1970s. "We wound up alienating both audiences, girls and boys," Cuti said about Charlton's own experiment in that area with *Haunted Love*. The title was dropped after four issues.

The end of the genre soon followed. The last *Young Love* rolled off DC's presses by 1977 and "deservedly so, "Howell said. "There was no personality to the stories and no character to the art." After a 30-year romance with American teens, the love comics had been kicked out of the house for good.

Yet, five years later, some believe that they can be reincarnated. Citing the keen interest in Harlequin novels and the continuing popularity of Spanish romance comics, TV soap operas and newspaper strips like *Brenda Starr*, they argue that there's still a vast market waiting to be tapped. Deliver the right mix of R-rated romance and action, of contemporary issues and good old-fashioned melodrama, with plenty of fine art to boot, and a whole new generation might be hooked.

Kalish is one of several who predicts that new, improved romance books may once again titillate readers "if some publisher is smart enough to realize there's a gold mine out there." Both the talent and the interest are there, she said.

But whether any comics company is willing to risk investing the money, talent and planning necessary to make such a project work is another story. Romance advocates are still too few and far between in the comics industry, which has plenty of other problems to worry about right now.

"Comic books as we know them have run their course," Simon said gloomily. "When you're only printing 250,000 copies of *Superman* [as opposed to 1.2 mullion in its heyday], you have to see the handwriting on the wall."

Nevertheless, no matter what shape comics may take in the near future, others still see hope for some type of illustrated love epics. "It will happen sooner or later," Kalish said. "And I pray that it's soon because I'm getting bored." ■

NEW?
IMPROVED?
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO
THE MIGHTY
THOR?
FIND OUT BEGINNING
IN ISSUE #337
ON SALE STARTING
IN JULY FROM
MARVEL
COMICS

What Are Your Comics REALLY Worth?

By MIKE BENTON

Editor's Note: Beginning this issue, Mike Benton begins a column about the art of collecting comics. Mike has been studying the subject for years and has written a book on the subject which will be published in the near future. The column will alternate with Creating the Comics, which returns next issue.

You may read comic books for love, but you sell them for money. And when you sell them, you will be surprised. Unpleasantly.

You will not make millions or thousands or hundreds of dollars from your comic collection. If you're planning a vacation, a college education, or even a house payment from the profits you make from selling your comic collection, then be warned: you may discover, like thousands of other ex-collectors, that comic books are not the path to Richie Rich wealth.

If you're going to spend time and money on comics, you should know what you can expect to get in return. Right off, you should receive hours of pleasure. If you don't enjoy reading comics for love, you have no business collecting them for money. But many collectors like both comics and money. You should know, then, what your comics are really worth—what they can actually be sold for. Any hobby that requires your time and money should be studied to see if it repays you.

Does comic collecting pay? If you believe newspaper and magazine articles, you will answer YES! If you follow trends in the comic book price guides, you will also believe that wealth awaits those who will sell their ever-increasing valuable collections. It's hard not to believe that comic collecting is a high-profit hobby.

On paper, comic books look like a dynamite investment. If you study the price increases of the top 50 valuable comic titles, you'll find out that comic books are a better investment than gold, stamps, coins, rare books, and probably even illicit drugs. As the table shows, a wide assortment of comic books purchased in 1971 can apparently yield an almost 600 percent return!

Of course, figures lie. If such an appreciation rate were real, then there would be *no* old comics or back issues. They would have all been bought up by wealthy Arab investors and Wall Street bankers who can recognize a good thing.

GUIDE VS. REALITY

The prices in official guides routinely hide the reality of comic book values from the casual fan and collector. The difference between the value of a comic in a price guide and its actual buying and selling prices can be unsettling to the person who takes his comic books to market for the first time.

A major comic dealer at a national convention once confided to me: "If I could sell every comic I own at even 75 percent of the price guide value, I could buy the Los Angeles Rams football team. Seriously. Yet these kids bring me a box of comics and whine and cry when I don't want them at full guide prices. Hell, I don't want most of that junk at a tenth of book value. What I'm telling you is that prices and profits on paper or in a guide are just that—paper prices and paper profits, and only once in a while do they correspond to the real comic book market."

"Basically, a comic book is worth exactly what another person will pay you for it," says Ron Tartar, a manager and partner in several comic book specialty shops. "A dealer buys for resale. If the comic won't sell, why buy it? And believe me, there are tons and tons of comics that don't sell. Here's a classic example: *Howard the Duck*. A few years ago, they sold moderately well. Now, it's a cause for celebration if I can sell the first issue for anywhere near guide. So how can you explain to the kid collector who wants you to buy his *Howard the Duck* collection that it's now basically worthless, and you don't want it—at any price?

"We cannot pay more than 50 percent guide price for any comic," Tartar explained to me in his shop. "And that's just for hot comics we know we can immediately resell. Any retail store has to operate on that 50 percent margin—the difference between what you buy a book for and what you can sell it for. Most retail businesses work on that margin and if you do not regularly sell books for at least twice what you paid for them, you'll be out of business."

Most comic dealers price their books at full guide prices. Does that mean they are paying 50 percent for all old comic books—including the ones tucked away in your closet?

"No way can I give half of guide for most Golden Age comic books [those published in the 1940s]," says Roy Bonarro, owner of Roy's House of Memories in Houston. "I can't even sell them at half of guide. You'll notice there are few Golden Age comics in my store. That's because I can only afford to offer a fraction of the guide price for them. The owners of such books usually refuse to sell them for that, unless they need money badly. I'll always pay half what I can sell a book for. I'm not trying to

10 Year Appreciation Rate of Selected Collectables

INVESTMENT	APPRECIATION RATE (1970-1980)
Coins	16.0%
Rare Books	16.1%
Ceramics	18.8%
Stamps	21.8%
Gold	31.6%
Comic Books*	582.4%

* (Top 50 most valuable comic titles, 1971-1980)

be greedy and do collectors out of their books, but it's suicide to believe you can buy and sell comic books at full guide prices—especially the older stuff that has a specialized market anyway."

Well, you still don't know what your comics are *really* worth. But you should know by now, however, that they are *not* worth full guide prices, at least to a dealer.

The problem is this: There is no one value for a back issue comic book. In fact, just about every comic book in your collection has at least six different values! So, hang on. You're about to get a graduate course lesson in comic book economics.

SALVAGE

Salvage has an unpleasant sound to it. It sounds like automobile junkyards or sunken ships. Yet your comic books have a basic salvage value. Salvage actually means to "save from destruction." The salvage value of your collection is what you can get for it as junked goods instead of just destroying the books or throwing them away.

Currently, the salvage value of used comics is anywhere from five to 15 cents apiece—that's based on the resale value of a used comic at half of its new price. In other words, if you walk into most used bookstores, flea markets, or resale shops, you would expect to get about 10 cents each for your old comics. So, if you want to junk your collection, you can always get the salvage price.

Every collectable also has an *intrinsic* worth. For example, a rare penny may be worth a hundred dollars to a coin collector, but its intrinsic, or actual, worth is one cent.

The "intrinsic worth" of a comic book is simply what the book is worth to read. In other words, new comic books sell for 60 or 75 cents because people consider them worth that much just to read.

"Surprisingly enough," says Ron Tarter, "there is actually a mathematically finite limit to how many *Dazzler* #10's I can sell. If I have a hundred copies in the back room, it's hard to get excited about buying another copy from a collector. And besides that, since most dealers get their new comics direct, we can build a stock of all back issue comics at below the cover price. That's the thing that blows some collectors' minds: When you tell them you can't even pay cover price for a back issue comic book. Not every comic book has a collector's value. Quite often, a book is worth more just to read and re-read than it is to try to sell."

So far, this may be a little depressing. You can either sell your collection for 10 cents a comic or you can re-read them until you go blind, or—you can go to the third level of values for your comics: the *support* prices for back issues.

Every collectable item, be it a comic book or a match-book cover or a china doll, has a base support price. This simply means that there is always some price at which the dealers will support the market. For example, I may have a thousand dollar comic book (by the guide value), but I probably can't sell the book for that much. There is some price, however, at which that thousand dollar comic will always sell to a dealer. It may be 500 or 100 or 10 dollars, but there is a supporting "buy" price for all legitimate collectables.

Currently, the support price for all back issue comics is around 25 percent of their true guide value. This figure is based on the national advertising "buy" prices of a major comic broker. He states in his ad that he will buy almost any comic listed in the price guide at 25 percent of its value. In other words, he is guaranteeing that your comics are worth at least one-fourth the current guide value, and that he will immediately purchase them for that amount.

Of course after you list and grade all your comics and take the added expense of mailing the comics to these dealers and brokers, you are probably only realizing about 20 percent or one-fifth the guide prices for your books.

Still, there are usually reputable comic book brokers who will buy the majority of your collection at around one-fourth of guide value. I spoke to one such broker who told me: "If I can't pay 25 percent for any back issue comic and not make a profit, eventually, then either one of two things is going on: one, the price guide is a total lie, which it isn't, or two, the market has dropped out and the guide hasn't had a chance to reflect those changes. I think that for comic collecting to be a legitimate hobby and for the guide to be well-respected, then you must have some sort of base support price for back issue comic books."

Roy Bonario, who has owned and operated four comic book stores over the past 17 years, agrees: "A collector should always be able to take his collected to a dealer and receive a fair price for his books. I have seen dealers advertise some books at, say, 20 dollars apiece. But if you offer them the same books at two or three dollars, they'll refuse to buy them. Now what the hell kind of market is that? I mean, if they're asking 20 bucks for a book, they should fall all over themselves to buy copies at two or three dollars. Yet they don't. This should tell you that you are being played for a sucker. It means that their books aren't worth that price if they won't offer some support in the form of 'buy' prices. Coin dealers, antique dealers, all legitimate collectable dealers know that there is an underlying support price for a market. It shouldn't be any different for comic book dealers."

VALUE LEVEL	CASH VALUE	COMMENTS
Salvage	5 to 15 cents/comic	Only damaged and junk comics should be sold at this price
Intrinsic	60 to 75 cents/comic	The replacement cost of a new comic; may not be actual cash
Support	20% of guide value	Guaranteed amount a reputable broker will offer you
Buy Price	35% of guide value	Can vary 10% to 100%, depending on book's demand in market
Sell Price	75% of guide value	Price paid for a back issue comic by most collectors
Guide Value	100% of guide	Often the "asking" retail price for moderate demand books

Years ago, this comic was worth lots of money. Today, it's not.
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE NEVER MADE!
HOWARD THE DUCK
FRANK GIRNS THE HEART OF A HEARTFUL CITY

THE BUY PRICE

And that brings us to the next value level of your comic: the *buy* price. Basically, a buy price is what an honest dealer can offer you for a comic. We've already seen

that, in most cases, this is about 50 percent of what they can sell a comic for. The "buy" price for most comics by a dealer is 25 percent to 50 percent of the guide—if they have the cash and can use the book. The buy price is always a little higher than the support price offered by comic brokers and wholesalers.

On the average, the buy price for a collectable comic is around 35 percent of its guide value. Of course, there are some books that will never bring more than their 20 percent to 25 percent support value, no matter what dealer you try. There are a few books that dealers will pay 75 percent to 100 percent of guide for, but this buy price simply reflects a sell price that is already above guide value.

This brings up the fifth value level of a comic book: its *sell* price. This is the price that you could get for your comics if you were a dealer or if you sold directly to other collectors. Normally, this is the highest price you can expect for your comics. Generally, most back issue comics sell for 50 percent to 100 percent of the guide value. On the average, a back issue comic usually sells for about 75 percent of guide.

This figure is in line with the approximate 35 percent buy figure used by dealers, since it reflects the markup dealers must use to make their margin.

The final value of a comic book is one most people are familiar with: the *Overstreet Price Guide* value. This value is good for three things: 1) as a basis to figure the percentages of these other values, 2) as a guide for trading comics of equal value, and 3) as a reference for insurance purposes. It is not a good value to figure the true worth of your collection or what you will get for it when it is sold.

Let's look at the chart—the six values a comic book can have, and what they may mean to you.

What can you learn from the chart? The first thing you can see is that if any comic you have is worth less than a dollar in the price guide, it basically has no collector value. In other words, a used book store may offer you as much for such a comic in salvage value as you could get from a broker or dealer.

So, what are your comic books *really* worth? Well, everybody knows that they are priceless anyway. What else can offer you hours of adventure and fun for so little a price? What other hobby can give you such a deep satisfaction of discovery?

But if you're talking American cash, your comic books are worth only what the next collector will pay you. And that may be 10 cents or 10 percent of guide or a 110 percent. So don't count on your comics for that new car or house—yet.

And most importantly, when that day comes when you have to figure what your comics are really worth, don't forget why you read comics in the first place—for love, not money. ■

Lettering

(Continued from page 8)

are those who will say that Dave Stevens' character is not a superhero, but nonetheless he has all the trappings: a secret identity, the cloying girl friend, the sidekick, and the badgering boss. He isn't even an effective crimefighter yet, due to his unfamiliarity with his new-found abilities. [Shades of Lee and Ditko's early *Spider-Man*!]

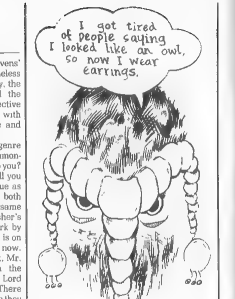
You seem outraged that an alternative genre book by the likes of Frank Miller or Walt Simonson would sell well. Is this so surprising to you? It isn't to me. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that there is a great deal of market value as well as merchandising associated with both these men's names, and others of the same caliber. If you think that that isn't a publisher's prime concern when commissioning work by these men, then I suggest that the coffee is on and you should be smelling it any minute now.

This is really what I'm trying to get at, Mr. Greenberger. Superheroes have been the mainstay of comics since their inception. Lord knows this is true of the last 20 years. There are more superhero books simply because they sell better, are more popular, and hence the publishers of superhero books make more money. This is the sad reality of a medium concerned mainly with fantasy.

Your views, however, are not so far removed from my own. Oh sure, I'm one of those schmucky superhero-loving readers that you seem to hate so much. I've been collecting for close to 10 years now and if you would look through my collection hoping to find a copy of anything relating to something other than my favorite genre, I'm afraid you would be disappointed. This doesn't mean that I don't respect other kinds of comic books, they just aren't my cup of tea. I may purchase some Duck books so that my collection would encompass some of the excellence of Carl Barks, but I would certainly never endeavor to own everything that the man ever produced. I have volumes and volumes of Jack Kirby stuff, but I am less than taken with *Captain Victory*, and down-right disappointed with *Silver Star*.

` Grant William Miehm
375 York Road
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
N1E 3H2

Hoo-boy! I never imagined I would receive so much mail from one editorial. Thank you, everyone, for responding and adding your own comments. The pieces we've chosen to excerpt should give you an idea of what the readership has had to say. We received a lot of mail from fans and even pros like Arn Saba. But, Grant's letter bothered me because he missed my point entirely. I am not outraged at the thought of a Walt Simonson Western—I applaud the thought. Also, I do not hate comics in any way—elsewise, why would I be editing this magazine? No, nor do I hate superhero comics. I've grown up with them. Rather, Grant, I am urging the smaller publishers to live up to the potential of the direct-sales marketplace. Not every title from Pacific, First, Eclipse and others has to be a detective, romance or supernatural book, but we should be offered more than we are currently getting. Since I wrote that at the beginning of the year, there have been some encouraging signs of life from luther



and yon. Maybe everyone is getting the message and people like Dani Sim and I can stop campaigning.

—Bob

Rerating the Writers

Dear COMICS SCENE:

. . . Issue #9 was really great. I have a couple of things that I would like to say about it. So here goes:

I totally disagree with Mr. Will Day's rating of Marv Wolfman. Marv's writing is not cute. It is obvious that Mr. Day has not seen a recent issue of *Night Force* or *The New Teen Titans*, because if he had he would quickly change his mind about calling Marv Wolfman's writing "cute."

Kevin Hall
Rte 1, Box 216
Castlewood, VI 24224

Dear et. al.,

. . . This is in response to Will Day's letter.

Stan Lee: Aside from the *Silver Surfer* things he's done in the last couple of years, I've seen nothing by the man. The Silver Surfer is not a fun guy. So how the hell can the guy be fun anymore (Stan, not the Surfer)?

Gerry Conway: Well, I gotta admit that I stopped reading this man a long time ago. He always kind of struck me as whiny and prima-dona-ish, due to his constant flip-flopping between Marvel and DC, and the way he tends to totally dominate his books

Steve Englehart: I totally agree with Will on this.

Steve Gerber: Bloodthirsty? You bet. Hypocritical? I don't think so. He does work for DC while at the same time advocating creators rights almost militantly. So what? He's an almost brilliant writer (really brilliant when given a free hand), and did you see the way *Howard the Duck* degenerated and how low he sank? Compare the many parodic, satiric, and just plain funny levels on which Gerber wrote

Howard to the almost constant stream of sex, violence and one-liners, often disguised as clever parody or loving tribute, which almost every other writer brought to the dude. Besides, he may just be insecure enough to need the security of one of the big companies (only human you know).

Jack Kirby, just as good as he ever was, despite an unfortunate tendency to use black-and-white characterization.

Don McGregor: Do you have any idea how hard it is to get a hold of current McGregor stuff in a small town at least 500 miles from a comic shop?

Roy Thomas: I again am in total agreement with Will.

Len Wein: Another man I must confess I get little opportunity to read.

Marv Wolfman: Since we are comparatively inundated with his stuff up here, I must assume I missed something he said at a convention to warrant any comparison with Gerber.

Chris Claremont: Good, that any writer who has his characters spend 15 minutes analyzing a fight, their feelings about their allies and opponents, what happened in the week leading to the fight, and what they plan to have for dinner if they survive, especially when they should be reacting without thinking (ever read *Iron Fist* and *Master of Kung Fu* back-to-back?) is definitely too talky.

Martin Pasko: Good when writing "straight," a bit too vicious when writing parody.

Chris Neal
2069 Riverside Dr.
Berlin, NH 03570

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . I have no idea what prompted you to print a letter by someone named Will Day "rating" comic writers. Perhaps you were short on material. However, I just couldn't allow some of his comments to pass unnoticed.

The reference to Steve Gerber as a "bloodthirsty hypocrite" and Marv Wolfman as "almost as bad as Gerber" forced me to spring to their defense.

Gerber is probably one of the most talented writers ever to grace the pages of a comic book. His story "Kid's Night Out" in *Giant-Size Man-Thing #4* is one of the true classics in the history of comics. Gerber's sense of drama, the subtleties of his humor, his keen and well-written dialogue put Gerber head and shoulders above 80 percent of all comic writers. He is much too sophisticated for the average comic reader as Mr. Day's letter proves.

Marv Wolfman is another writer that it seems popular to attack. His work on such classics as *Tomb of Dracula* and *D.C.'s Night Force* are examples of just how good comics as literature can be. Wolfman is the Stephen King of comics. He sets both mood and pace in his stories that are unparalleled in comics.

Writers such as Wolfman, Gerber, Dave Sim, Marty Pasko, J.M. DeMatteis and Max Collins are the reason that I still buy, read, and enjoy comics. I myself am a writer and I respect the talents of such men far more than I can tolerate a spoilt and haphazard attack on their skills.

T.E. Pouncey
Wichita, KS 67206

From Far Far Away

Dear Editors,

. . . I guess this is the first letter you got from a Greek fan. I also guess that you never even thought you would get one from a country where comics and fandom are almost non-existent.

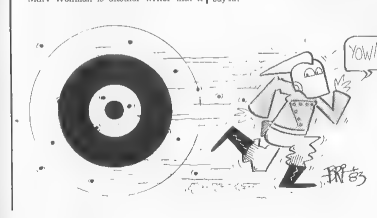
Well, here it is anyway. After 10 years of collecting the imported American comics, I write this letter to you. After searching this 3.5 million population city every month trying to find my comics, and after paying double the price every time, I found them.

I consider myself a big fan. I've collected more than 5,000 comics since then. American fans can't understand what it's like to try desperately to get your comics and miss so many of them because they're never distributed here (particular issues as well as whole titles). But worst of all, it's lonely. I know that there have to be other fans in Greece, but I've never met one.

Are there any APAs that would accept members from outside the USA? Is there anyway I can get all those comics I've missed—and I do mean all! I'd also like to ask you fans from anywhere in the world (Greece included) to write me, please. Let me know that there are people who would like to make me feel that I'm not alone.

Dionissi Tzaraess
4B Pyzzou St
Kifissia, Athens, Greece

If you write to any of the APAs listed back in issue #6, we bet many would be willing to have an international member—as long as you can maintain your contributions on a regular schedule. As for finding back issues, either your new-found APA friends can help or try some of the ads found in the comics or COMICS SCENE. And readers, if you have some time, why don't you drop Dionissi a short note and say hi? ■



Bates

(Continued from page 36)

film was being re-edited and polished in an effort to make it successful and the strip was stalled.

"Then," Bates explains, "Jim Lawrence left *Buck Rogers* and they asked me to do *Buck Rogers* on an emergency basis. So, I was writing *Buck Rogers* before the Ranger became a regular strip." (For more on the Ranger, see our next issue.)

Bates likes the fact that the two strips are so dissimilar. The strip deadlines are always changing and he is forced to spend bits and pieces of his work week writing the adventures of the Masked Man of the Old West and the first of the SF strip heroes. "It's so confusing because quite often we're doing the Sundays ahead of the dailies and it's the same story. That's a juggling act," Bates says, slumping a little lower in his seat.

"In some ways, the plotting is great because it makes you think in linear terms. You know how fast you can move a story and keep the reader with you. It's helpful in the comic book because it teaches you to think in terms of logic and plot."

Bates pauses for a moment and adds, "It's funny. *Superman* and the *Lone Ranger* had such an impact on me as a kid when I watched them on TV. I never dreamed I would be writing them. James Bond, too. That's something that I just started out with being a fan. I liked the movies and went back to the Fleming books later. I decided I liked the films better. Anyway, it's like everything that I was fascinated with as a child I've somehow been involved with as a professional."

Bates has turned his interest in the visual things in life into a valuable tool as a writer as he urges other writers to think visually, too. For the first 15 years, he wrote his stories in the full-script method, but in the last two years, he has loosened his style considerably.

"I give Carmine Infantino or Curt Swan thumbnail panel breakdowns and they draw the pages and then I go back to 'write' it. If I ask for a sequence to involve four or five panels, I don't have to know what's being said, but just that it will take that much space. I don't insist they follow it but Carmine and Curt seem to like my panel breakdowns.

"I think it's advantageous when you see what's on the page, so you don't repeat yourself in the writing. Seeing the characters drawn sometimes makes you go one step further than what you had planned."

Bates is satisfied with his career at the moment. Although he's waiting for his cinema career to take off, he's just as happy to continue chronicling the adventures of the World's Greatest Superhero, the Fastest Man Alive, the Masked Man of the West and the Savior of 25th Century. ■

First Annual Reader's Poll

The editors of COMICS SCENE are wondering about you. What do you like about this magazine and comics in general? We've assembled this poll to discover the answers. Our friends at DC Comics have provided some goodies to help encourage you to respond. Check off the appropriate box and you'll automatically be entered in a drawing for the prizes: six copies of the *Star Raiders* graphic novel, a dozen subscriptions to their newest title, *Thriller* and several surprise "goodie" packages. All you have to do is send this page (or a xerox or a facsimile) to us by September 1. Send your finished polls to COMICS SCENE READERS' POLL/475 Park Avenue South/New York, NY 10016. We'll publish the results in our second anniversary issue, on sale in November.

	More	Same	Less	Drop It!
1. DC Coverage				
2. Marvel Coverage				
3. Ind. coverage (Eclipse, First, Pacific, etc.)				
4. Comic strip coverage				
5. Animation coverage				
6 Comics history				
7 Movie & TV coverage				
8. Artist interviews				
9. Writer interviews				
10 Editor interviews				
11 Thought Balloons				
12. CS Picks				
13. Preview				
14. Guest Spot				
15 Around the World				
16. Comics Reporter				
17. Focus				
16. Reader contests				
19 Convention coverage				
20 Convention calendar				

Please fill out as accurately as possible:

How many records a month do you buy _____

How many movies do you see a month _____

How many hours a week do you watch TV _____

How often do you buy videogames: _____

How many hours do you play videogames a week. _____

How many books a year, other than comics, do you read: _____

How many hours a week do you listen to radio _____

How many times a month do you go out drinking _____

How many times a month do you go out with your boy/girlfriend. _____

Which comics genres do you enjoy reading (check as many as apply).

[ ] Superhero	[ ] Romance	[ ] Science fiction
[ ] War	[ ] Supernatural	[ ] Fantasy
[ ] Western	[ ] Funny Stuff	[ ] Adventure
	[ ] Underground comix	

Have any of the following influenced your decision to buy a comic:

[ ] review in fanzine [ ] preview [ ]convention appearance [ ] fanzine ad [ ] comics ad
[ ] poster [ ] coverage in COMICS SCENE [ ] recommendation of friend [ ]published by favorite company

Name your five favorite:

Comics titles 1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____	5 _____
Pencilers 1	2.	3.	4	5
Inkers 1	2	3	4	5
Writers 1	2	3.	4	5

Name your five least favorite comics titles

1. _____ 2. _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Would you be willing to pay more for a comic printed on:

[ ] Mando (First) [ ] Baxter (Camelot 3000) [ ]Hudson (Marvel Fanfare) [ ] Roneweb (Ronin)

How much are you willing to pay [ ]$.75 [ ]$1 [ ]$1.25 [ ]$1.50 [ ]$2 [ ] More

Did you buy this issue at a [ ] comics shop [ ] convenience store [ ] drug store [ ] grocery store [ ] subscriber [ ] I'm reading a friend's copy

Where do you buy comics regularly:

[ ]comics shop [ ]convenience store [ ]grocery store [ ]drug store [ ]subscriber service
[ ]company subscription [ ]newsstand

How often? _____ How much a month do you spend on comics? _____

Do you attend conventions: [ ] Yes [ ] No If yes, how often? _____

Do you read any of the following (check as many as apply):

[ ] *Comics Journal*	[ ] *Amazing Heroes*	[ ] *Fantastic Films*	[ ] Newsweek	Age: _____
[ ] *Comics Feature*	[ ] *Starlog*	[ ] *American Film*	[ ] Playboy	[ ] Male [ ] Female
[ ] *Comic Reader*	[ ] *Fangoria*	[ ] *People*	[ ] Ms.	
[ ] *Comic Buyer's Guide*	[ ] *Cinefantastique*	[ ] *Time*	[ ] *Rolling Stone*	
[ ] Local newspaper	[ ] *Penthouse*	[ ] *Cream*	[ ] Esquire	

Other _____

Check the last grade attended:

[ ] 8th	[ ] HS graduate	[ ] some graduate work
[ ] 9th	[ ] some college	[ ] masters degree
[ ] some high school	[ ] college graduate	

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, _____

State, Zip: _____

Do you earn your own living? [ ] Yes [ ] No
Are you supported by your parents? [ ] Yes [ ] No
Have you ever travelled more than one hour to reach a convention? [ ] Yes [ ] No
Have you ever travelled more than one hour to reach a comics shop? [ ] Yes [ ] No

[ ] Yes, now that I've filled this sucker out, I do want to be entered in the drawing for DC goodies!

CS Picks

Each issue, in this space, we will point out the highlights of the upcoming comics crop. Month listed is release date, not cover date.

Alien Worlds #4, July. Pacific. Cover by Dave Stevens [Rocketeer]. The lead story, "Princess Pam," is written and pencilled by Bruce Jones with Stevens inks. Also included in this issue is work by Williamson, Frazetta and Steacy.

Alpha Flight #4, August. Marvel. John Byrne does it all, telling the origin of Marrina, featuring guest shots from the Sub-Mariner and the Invisible Girl.

Amazing Spider-Man #245, July. Marvel. Roger Stern and John Romita, Jr. continue their year-long run to Spidey's 250th issue, as the Hobgoblin returns. Inks by Klaus Janson.

American Flagg #2, July. First. Howard Chaykin tells why "it's tough keeping the peace on a typical Saturday night in Chicago, circa 2031."

Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld #6, July; #7, August. DC. Dan Mishkin, Gary Cohn and Ernie Colon take us back to Gemworld as Amy decides to spend her full-time there, much to her earthly parents' dismay. *Highly recommended.*

Avengers #236, July. Marvel. Earth's mightiest heroes celebrate 20 years of togetherness, battling the juggernaut all the while. Script by Roger Stern, art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott.

Blackhawk #263, July; #264, August. DC. More WW II magic from Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle. Possibly the best non-superhero title published today.

Cloak and Dagger #1, July. Marvel. First issue of the four part mini-series about Spider-Man's mysterious semi-allies, with gorgeous art by Rick Leonardi and Terry Austin. Scripted by Bill Mantlo.

Defenders #125, August. Marvel. The big shake-up of Marvel's "non-team" as they become a sort of "Ex-X-Men". Written by J.M. DeMatteis, pencilled by Don Perlin, inked by Kim DeMulder.

Elfquest #15, July. WaRP. Wendy and Richard Pini answer some of the questions left by the previous issue. Plus a special insert previews WaRP's new science-fantasy title, *A Distant Soil*, by Richard Pini and newcomer Colleen Doran.

Green Lantern #169, July. DC. Hal Jordan nears the end of his exile in space, as he confronts a Guardian review board. Story by Keith Giffen and Robin Snyder, art by the seldom-seen Alex Toth.

Hawkeye #3, August. Marvel. Mark Gruenwald and Brett Breeding continue their look at the life of the ace archer, including the origin of Mockingbird.

Justice League #219, July; #220, August. DC. The 20th annual JLA/ISA team-up. What superhero fan could ask for more? Written by Roy Thomas, pencilled by Chuck Patton, inked by Romeo Tanghal.

Star Raiders Graphic Novel, August. DC enters the field with this interstellar tale told by Elliot S. Maggin and Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez, featuring *full-color painted art.*

Thor #337, August. Marvel. Walt Simonson takes over all the chores on the Thunder God's book, introducing a big change in Don Blake's life: what if he hasn't got the walking stick/hammer?

Thriller #1, August. DC. A new series by Robert Loren Fleming and Trevor von Eeden featuring non-superheroic action and adventure. A reminder of the glory days of the Challengers and the Secret Six. (See page 46 for more details.)

X-Men #174, July. Marvel. The interlude between two weddings. Wolverine's and Cyclops'. Script by Chris Claremont, pencils by Paul Smith, inks by Bob Wiacek.

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Ed. Notes

First, it is my pleasure and delight to welcome aboard two new members of the COMICS SCENE family: Managing Editor Pat O'Neill and iconoclastic columnist Marty Pasko. Both are valued additions to the magazine who've wasted no time in rolling up their sleeves and tackling their new responsibilities with energy and intelligence. Speaking of which, kudos to Marty on his first column (see page 38). I'd like to comment on some of the points he raises.

It is a matter of record that comic book sales are down (even though the industry continues to manipulate the numbers to prove the opposite). Go to any comics convention and ask the dealers, or speak with the owner of your nearest candy store—where racks of high-profit magazines continue to push comics off the walls.

Figuring out why this is happening is a different matter entirely. What's happening in the world of comics is, in many ways, a reflection of shifts and changes in the social and cultural patterns of the country as a whole.

Marty Pasko is definitely on target when he cites a growing selectivity on the part of the comics buyer and links it to cash considerations. Let's face it: comics have become too damned expensive to buy every book that is published every month. Don't laugh—there was a time not too long ago when I did exactly that. Today, it is economically unfeasible. In fact, as a fan and collector, I find it cheaper to buy back issues (even Silver and Golden Age) to fill the holes in my collection, than to keep it current and up-to-the-month. And, for the most part, it's a better investment.

Another part of the problem is the depressing, monolithic sameness that pervades most of the Comics Code Approved titles. And, in order to get their share of the market, the independent publishers seem to be intent on infusing their nascent lines with that identical sameness.

To find out why, let's look at the Eclipse line of comics, published and edited with loving care by the Surf City kids, Jan and Dean Mullaney. Their first full-color comic was *Destroyer Duck* by Steve Gerber and Jack Kirby—certainly not your typical Marvel or DC product. Then they picked up Don McGregor's *Sabre*. Again, not the kind of comic one finds from the big houses. Next up was Max Collins' and Terry Beatty's *Ms. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures*. All three of these are not only *different*, not only are they a viable alternative, these are excellent books! So what's wrong with that, you say? Well, nothing . . . except that they don't sell in enough volume to keep Eclipse's doors open. And so, Jan and Dean bent to the pressures being applied and came up with a new color comic, *The DNAgents*. Except that it's not new—we've seen it all before, many, many times. Dedicated to changing the system from within, the Mullaney brothers are coming dangerously close to becoming part of it.

Still, Eclipse is far ahead of the field in terms of innovation and dedication to change. The recent crop of titles from First, Pacific, Red Circle, etc. has been a big disappointment.

What can be done? In a nutshell, comics have to lose their sameness, allow innovation and an alternative to superheroes, lower their cover prices, and be content with sales in the 30-50,000 copy range, if the sales are consistent and the title has solid writing and storytelling.

Is this likely to happen? What do you people think?

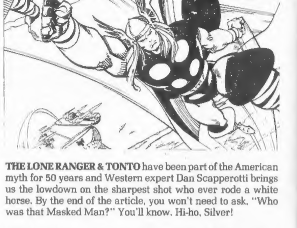
Howard Zimmerman/Editor-in-Chief

To Be Continued...

FALL PREVIEW ISSUE

Next issue we'll have a special section, previewing the best in new products coming this fall from the comic companies and animation studios. The section is headed by a full-color pictorial starring the colorful heroes, gadgets and video games that will be seen **Saturday mornings**. Meanwhile, **Bob Layton** has been working on the second *Hercules* series and he chats, once again, with David McDonnell about what's in store for our favorite Olympian. We've heard some of the details already and it's sure to beat last year's series.

WALT SIMONSON has been writing and pencilling *Thor* for a few months and now that he has settled in, he takes the time to talk with Jack C. Harris about his illustrious and varied career. We'll hear about *Manhunter*, *Star Slammers*, *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser*, the *X-Men/Teen Titans* story and much more. And of course, we'll see tons of terrific artwork.



THE LONE RANGER & TONTO have been part of the American myth for 50 years and Western expert Dan Scapperotti brings us the lowdown on the sharpest shot who ever rode a white horse. By the end of the article, you won't need to ask. "Who was that Masked Man?" You'll know. Hi-ho, Silver!

DARGAUD is one of the most respected names in France and their line of comics albums has invaded the United States. Find out what the company is about and what they have in store for America in a penetrating portrait from Alan Breznick. Also, Around the World looks at **Barbarella** on screen and in print.

PLUS Creating the comics on coloring . . . **Martin Pasko** talks further about the four-color industry . . . **Chris Claremont** on Sex and Death . . . and whatever else we can cram into this issue. Look for us when we go

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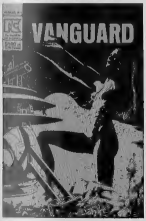

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- Indiana Jones
- Iron Man
- Kazar
- King Conan
- Kull: the Conqueror
- Marvel & DC Present
- Marvel Age (News!)
- Marvel Fanfare
- Marvel Tales
- Marvel Team-Up
- Micronauts
- Moon Knight
- New Mutants
- Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe
- Peter Parker
- Powerman & Iron Fist
- Rom
- Star Wars
- The Thing
- Thor
- U.S. 1
- What If . . . ?
- X-Men
- Any Limited Series
- Any One-shot
- Any Marvel #1
- Any Marvel #1 (No reprints)
- All Marvel Annuals
- Any "Baxter" reprints
- Selected Marvel Annuals

EPIC COMICS
- Coyote
- Dreadstar
- Any Epic #1

MARVEL MAGAZINES
- Epic Illustrated
- Marvel Graphic Novel
- Marvel Super Special
- Savage Sword

DC COMICS
- Action
- All-Star Squadron
- Amethyst, Princess of Gem World
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- New Teen Titans
- Night Force
- Omega Men
- Ronin (Frank Miller)
- Saga of Swamp Thing
- Sgt. Rock
- Superboy
- Supergirl
- Superman
- Vigilante
- Warlord

DC COMICS
- Wonder Woman
- World's Finest
- Zero Man
- Adventure Digest
- Best of DC Digest
- Any DC #1
- Any DC #1 (No reprints)
- Any DC Maxi-series
- Any DC Mini-series
- All DC Annuals
- Selected DC Annuals
- Any DC Insert Comic
- Any DC One-shot
- Any DC Graphic Novel

FIRST COMICS
- American Flagg
- E-Man
- Mars
- Jon Sable: Freelance
- Starslayer
- Warp
- Warp Special
- Any First Comics #1

PACIFIC COMICS
- Alien Worlds
- Berni Wrightson (Master of the Macabre)
- Captain Victory
- Edge of Chaos
- Elric of Melnibone
- Groo, the Wanderer
- Ms. Mystic
- Pacific Presents
- Quest and Other Tales
- Silver Star
- Somerset Holmes
- Twisted Tales
- World of Wood
- Any Pacific One-shot
- Any Pacific #1

RED CIRCLE
- Black Hood
- Blue Ribbon
- Comet
- Fly

RED CIRCLE
- Galaxia (Magazine)
- Hang Man
- Jaguar
- Mighty Crusaders
- Shield
- Thunder Bunny
- Any Red Circle #1
- Any Red Circle Mini-series

IMPORTS
- Dr. Who Monthly (Marvel U.K.)
- Cinema (Marvel U.K.)
- Dan Dare (Dragon's Dream)
- Starburst (Marvel U.K.)
- Warrior (Quality)

TITAN BOOKS, LTD.
- A B C Warriors
- Charley's War
- Comic Tales (color)
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- Jeff Hawke
- Judge Dredd
- Nemesis

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- Badger, The (Capital Publ.)

ALTERNATIVE COMICS
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- Grendel (Comico)
- Hall of Fame (John C. Publ.)
- Hembeck (Fantaco)
- Hugo
- Journey (A. Vanaheim)
- Justice Machine (Noble)
- Ken Pierce Reprint Series
- Love & Rockets
- Masterworks Series
- Neil the Horse (A. Vanaheim)
- Nemo (Classic Comics Library)
- Nexus (Capital Publ.)
- Pogo: The Okeefenokee Star
- Skrog (Comico)
- Slaughterman (Comico)
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- Star Fighters
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- Swords of Cerebus
- Thunder Agents (John C. Publ.)
- Voyages (Nautilus Dreams)
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- Destroyer Duck
- DNAgents
- Eclipse
- "Hall of Fame Series"

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- Sabre
- Scorpio Rose
- Any Eclipse #1

AMERICOMICS
- Americomics
- Americomics Special
- Black Diamond
- Bolt & Star Force 6
- Fun Comics
- Sentinels of Justice
- Any Americomics #1

EAGLE COMICS
- Judge Dredd (color)

FAN MAGAZINES
- Amazing Heroes
- Bondage (James Bond)
- Comic Book Price Guide Update #2
- Comic Fandom's Forum
- Comic Informer
- Comic News
- Comic Reader
- Comics Collector
- Comics Feature
- Comics Interview
- Comics Journal
- Comics Scene
- Enterprise Incidents
- Fanfare
- Fantaco Chronicles Series
- Fantastic Exploits
- Fantasy Book (SF)
- Fantasy Empire
- Fantasy Images
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- Panels
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- RBCC
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